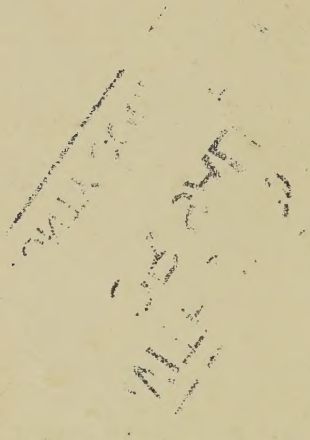


AD 03719900

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/countryyearbook0000thom

THE

COUNTRY YEAR BOOK.

SPRING & SUMMER.

Engraved and Printed in Colours by Vizetelly Brothers and Co

SPRING :—PLOUGHING.

THE

COUNTRY YEAR BOOK,

DESCRIPTIVE OF THE SEASONS;
RURAL SCENES AND RUSTIC AMUSEMENTS;
BIRDS, INSECTS, AND QUADRUPEDS.

BY THOMAS MILLER,

WITH ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS,
Engraved on Wood, by HENRY VIZETELLY, and Others.

SPRING & SUMMER.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 186 STRAND.
MDCCCXLVII.

2/12/03

LINCOLNSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

LONDON:

VIZETELLY BROTHERS AND CO., PRINTERS AND ENGRAVERS,

PETERBOROUGH COURT, FLEET STREET.

Contents.

Beauty of Spring described—Song of the Skylark—Happy Life of the Birds—Ploughing—Cottages and Cottage Gardens—The Variety of Beautiful Scenery to be Found in an English Landscape—Why England is such a Glorious Country—Gathering Palm and Early Spring Flowers—Poetry to be found in Rural Scenery—Description of Rooks; their Quarrels, and what they say to one another—An Old-fashioned Rookery—Carrion Crows—Village Street on a Spring Evening—Amusements of Poor Children—Some Account of the Author's Playmates—Stir that Spring makes amongst Boys—What the Birds say to one another; their Kindness to each other—My Boyish Haunts—Pleasures of Memory—An Apology for Rearing Young Birds—Birds'-nesting described; Beauty and Variety of their Nests: Nest of the Throstle; Sand Martin; Skylark; Missel-thrush; Woodpigeon; Goldfinch; Magpie—How I brought up Young Birds—Hive-bees; Nurse-bees; Wax-workers and Queen-bees—Rough, Healthy, Out-of-door Games—An Adventure that befel the Author—The Stock-dove; Beauty and Variety of Spring Flowers—Progress of Spring—Some Account of a Butterfly that went out for a Day's Pleasure—Bark-peelers and Wood-cutters; their Woodland Life—Description of Snakes and Vipers, with a caution to avoid the latter—Story of Little Nell; her Brother; the Pony and the Cart; with the Death and Burial of Little Nell—The Curlew—Habits of the Nuthatch and Woodpecker—Young Lambs at Play—Bloomfield's beautiful Description of Young Lambs—Bullfinches great Destroyers of Buds; their Nest described—The Ringed-dotterel

—May-day in the Olden Time, in Surrey; how we celebrated May-day in the Country—Description of a wild, lonely Cottage in a Wood—Angling in Spring—The Old Bridge, a Poem—English History; the Pleasure to be derived from Reading it—Golden Plover—The Old Sluice Gates—Return of Swallows—Never-sweat-a-hair, or the Man who never did any thing in a Hurry—Flying Jemmy—The Old Saw-pit and See-saw—Whitsuntide Games: Climbing the Pole; Hunting the Pig; Jumping in Sacks; The Wheelbarrow Race, blindfolded; Eating Hot Hasty-pudding; The Donkey Race—A Village School, and what Progress the Scholars made, with a Description of the Schoolmaster—Life of a Country Boy, and what he does until he grows up a Man—The Old Ratcatcher—Description of a little Village Shop, where they sell every thing—Easter Holidays—The Knot and Teal—Pleasure derived from a Study of Natural History—Why Spring is the Pleasantest Season of the Year—The Changes that mark the Approach of Summer—The End of Spring.

A FEW WORDS TO MY YOUNG READERS,

WHETHER AT SCHOOL, AT HOME, OR ABROAD.

MOST RESPECTED SIRS:

LIKE a garrulous old gossip, I am about to tell you how I came to write this work—what doubts I set out with—what fears I had at the commencement—and what pleasure it afforded me when I at last sat down earnestly to my task. First, then, I felt fearful, having written so many books descriptive of the country, and country life, that I should find it difficult to produce any thing new and interesting on a similar subject. "But," argued a grave and learned friend, who has ever the welfare of youth at heart, "you have not yet written any thing for Boys; and as you were once a country-boy yourself, you must have seen and heard of many things which would be alike interesting, amusing, and instructive to them, were you to tell all you know in a light, agreeable manner,—not in that silly, childish style, which is

called the simple school of writing, but, if aught, rather above than beneath their capacities; for a clever lad will always manage to get at your meaning, when it is not buried beneath technical phrases: so do not fear being a little poetical and imaginative now and then—he will like your work all the better if a few such flowers are thrown around it judiciously. You can do it, if you will."

Well, I thought at last I could; so throwing aside all my doubts and fears, I at once begun to tell you what I did, what I saw, and what I thought, when I was a country-boy: and so fresh, and vivid, and life-like, did many of the old familiar scenes rise again before me whilst I wrote, that I felt the warm sunshine playing about my heart, bright, and light, and beautiful, as it did twenty long summers ago; and I was thankful that there was still so much of the old boyish feeling within me, which fitted me better to become your gay companion, than your grave tutor. And when I found how beautifully my respected Publishers were determined to illustrate and bring out "The Boy's Own Library," I not only resolved to amuse and please you, but also to blend useful knowledge and agreeable instruction with my country rambles, boyish games, and rural tales; so I began "to brush up my larning," and to hunt about for information respecting the habits of beasts, birds, insects, and flowers, and all sorts of country things which had interested me so much when a boy. I also read many valuable works, such as you would not yet understand in their original forms; and these I adapted to your comprehension, and endeavoured to show you how the smallest flower that blows, and the tiniest insect that flies, are a part of one great and grand system, which is through-

out stamped by the CREATIVE POWER of GOD. That the more we study Nature, the greater our pleasure becomes; and that the paths which lead to such knowledge are the most delightful of all: and that the labour of gathering it in such pleasant places, as the green out-of-door world, is to lead a happier life than either a bee or a butterfly, who are always hovering about amongst the sweet flowers, though they cannot, like you, appreciate the wonderful works in which they find so much delight.

I have also shown you that the country can never become wearisome; that throughout the changes of every Season, you may always find something to instruct and delight you: and I believe that there never yet was a boy in whose heart a love of the beautiful country had been firmly implanted, who, when he became a man, could ever in after life stifle that inward yearning for those green, old, familiar places. For he who has once watched the birds build in Spring, and felt a pleasure in listening to their "wood-notes wild;" who has wandered for miles, ankle-deep, in the waving flowers of Summer; rambled through the woods when the solemn winds of Autumn strewed the entangled pathways with yellow leaves; or seen the untrodden snow lying broad and white upon the ground in Winter, as if the fields were paved with spotless marble, can never forget that

"God made the country, and man made the town."

To increase your love for the beautiful scenery of England—to make you fonder of its wild green woods, flower-covered hills, pastoral plains, pleasant walks, and sweet river-side scenery—I have written these books; conscious that you will feel much pleasure in reading

them, and in becoming better acquainted with many things, which are to be found in the country, that will be entirely new to you. I also have my pleasure in knowing that I have done something for the youth of Great Britain, that will make them more attached to their native land,—that little island like a

"Precious stone set in the silver sea,"—

whose renown the winds and waves have wafted to the uttermost ends of the earth.

And now, my much approved young Masters, with my kindest wishes I bid you, for the present,—Farewell.

Yours Truly

SPRING

When daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cuckoo buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then on every tree
Sings cuckoo, cuckoo.—SHAKSPERE

WHAT a pleasant sound there is about the word Spring, or Spring-time! How sweetly it falls upon the ear, bringing also with it visions of primrose-covered banks, and primrose-coloured skies, just warm enough to tempt "those little angels of the trees," the birds, to come back again from over the sunny seas, build in their former haunts, and sing, in their old familiar hedgerows and greenwood shades, all the sweeter through having been so long away from us! Oh! how dull would appear

those great, solemn, cathedral-looking forests without these little winged choristers to warble in them, and break the silence by the sound of their sweet notes—sweeter than the jingling of a thousand silver bells, all chiming with one accord! What beauty now breaks upon us on every side! what pleasant objects greet the eye! what a lightness and buoyancy there is about our hearts! the very soul seems as if it longed to escape, fly abroad, and mingle in the sunshine with the breeze, the birds, and the flowers! Up springs the skylark from among the young daisies, where it has slept all night long, shaking the beaded dew-drops from its wings, as it soars singing into the clear and sunny blue of heaven, seeming to beat time to its own music by the motion of its pinions as it rises higher and higher, until it looks no larger than a bee, then diminishes into a mere speck, so small, that if the eye but loses sight of it for a moment, it vanishes amid the floating silver of the cloud, and its note sounds fainter and afar off, as if it were singing, at the same time, both to earth and heaven!—and we might almost fancy that there were angels' faces looking down and listening to its music, as they leant over the golden edges of the sun-dyed clouds, even as we look upward, and try in vain to catch another glance at the little chorister, who sings, as Shakspere says, "at heaven's gate." Further on, you hear a whole choir of linnets calling to, and answering each other, from every budding spray, and opening hedgerow; and so much does their song harmonize with your own feelings, that you seem to hear them say to one another, "Oh, what a lovely Spring this is!" For all you fancy they can find to sing about, is their nests, the flowers, the budding may-blossoms, their young ones, the sunshine, morning, and the hushed twilight of evening, what buds they will feed upon, and what spots they will visit on the morrow. And what greater enjoyment can a boy wish for, than thus to ramble through the fields, and woods, and beside clear and pleasant rivers, at this delightful

season of the year, indulging in all kinds of wayward fancies, in watching the flowers and young buds as they blow and blossom, thicker and sweeter every day; or in endeavouring to distinguish the note of a particular bird, which has newly arrived from some far-off and foreign shore, and flown for many a mile over the ever-beating billows of the deep-voiced sea, to join the great band of winged musicians, who have come to play all the long summer in our green old English woods. There is something cheering and refreshing about even the smell of the earth as it is turned up by the ploughshare: it throws a countrified air all around, and it is pleasing to watch the heavy furrows as they move and fall over each other, then rest like the ridges upon the sea-shore, as wave after wave retreats, leaving only behind its footmark in long trails upon the sleeping sand. In passing the cottage gardens, too, you cannot resist stopping to peep over the railed fences, or through the half-naked hedges, for the golden crocuses attract the eye whether you look or not, and tell you that Spring has come again. Even the doors and windows of the cottages are thrown open, as if to invite you to peep inside, to see how clean and cheerful the sunshine, which has stepped in before you, has made them; for it is the gold which God scatters out of heaven upon the very poor to comfort them.

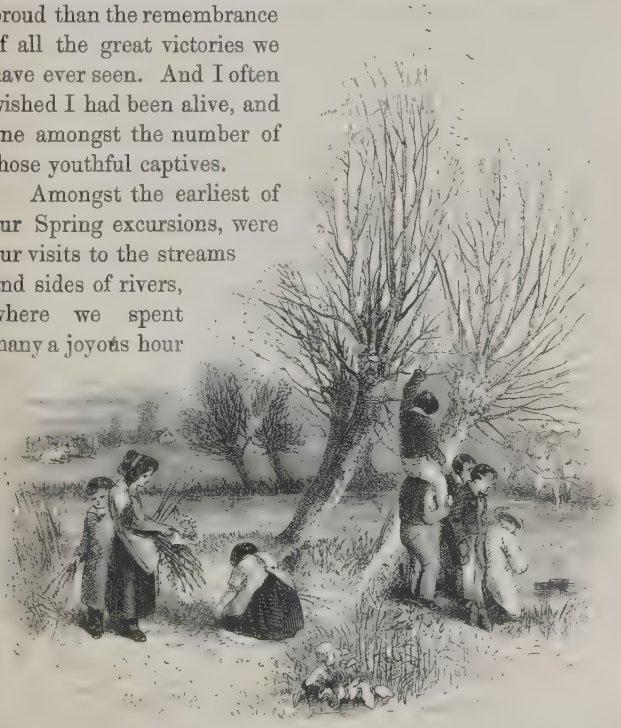
Oh my boys, what days of pleasure have we now before us! what delightful walks through healthy meadows, where we shall hear the golden-belted bee go humming over the blossoms, and see the gaudy butterfly resting like a folded pea-flower upon some newly opened bud! What concerts are already preparing for us in the woods, what sweet music now rings through the valleys, what green leaves are growing longer every day, to make an embowered shade for us to sit under, when we are weary through walking! What a drowsy murmuring there is about the rivers and streams, as if even the waters felt joyous in the warm sun-

shine, and could not refrain from telling the smooth pebbles, over which they passed, and the great golden marsh-marigolds, whose images they reflect back, how happy they have felt since Spring broke loose their icy fetters, and left them once more to wander "at their own sweet will!" For our England is a beautiful country, the climate so sweetly tempered, such gradual transitions from heat to cold, and cold to heat; such healthy breezes sweep over it from the wide and open seas by which it is every way surrounded; and its scenery is so delightful, and so varied with its rising hills and sunken valleys, and sloping uplands that seem neither hill nor vale; its lovely green woods and broad pasture-lands, through which rivers go winding like silver braids, running over a ground of rich velvet; and then over all these reigns such peace, that for miles and miles away, the country looks like one great garden—and while you gaze over such lovely scenery, you seem to ask yourself, that since the earth is so beautiful, what must heaven be? And this very England I would have you love more and more, however far away circumstances may remove you from it. I would never have you forget the country over which Alfred reigned; and for whose religion Latimer died; the land in which Shakspere was born, and buried; where Milton sung; and Newton made such discoveries, as astonished the whole world. Such is the country to which you and I belong, the proud mother that nursed us, and that numbers amongst her children more noble names, than ever enriched the annals of any other kingdom in the whole wide world.

Nor ought we to feel less proud on account of our wave-beaten island having been first invaded by the Romans, when we remember that no less a genius than Julius Cæsar first taught our ancient forefathers civilization, and brought to our shores the very laws and government, by which classic Rome was herself ruled; and that, throughout all the changes of time, these have never been lost sight of by our legislators.

And, but for that invasion, those beautiful English boys, which attracted the eye of Gregory the Great, would never have stood in the slave-market of Rome; nor would he, probably, ever have thought of sending missionaries to instruct our ancestors, in the Christian religion, but for them. What a thrill did it send through my heart, when I first read that passage in history, to know that nearly fifteen hundred years ago a few beautiful English boys were the cause of Christianity being first taught in this island! That thought often made me feel more proud than the remembrance of all the great victories we have ever seen. And I often wished I had been alive, and one amongst the number of those youthful captives.

Amongst the earliest of our Spring excursions, were our visits to the streams and sides of rivers, where we spent many a joyous hour



GATHERING PALM,

as we called the budding willows and sallows, which were covered with golden and silver-coloured catkins; and these we carried home to place among the few flowers which we had found scattered upon the lap of Spring; for we never fancied the cottage looked as it ought to do, unless it was ornamented with a nosegay against Palm-Sunday; for it was an old and simple custom, endeared to us all the more through those beautiful passages in the New Testament, which describe Christ's entry into Jerusalem on that holy day. It seemed also a gathering together of the first offerings of Spring, for around the palm we planted the long green silken leaves and pearl-like flowers of the lily-of-the-valley; and these we surrounded with wild blue-bells, and spotted cowslips, and pale primroses, which we hemmed in by a narrow border of violets, sweeter than all earthly perfumes, and daisies rimmed like the little stars of heaven. And when we looked upon all these treasures so neatly placed in the rich china jug, or rude earthen vessel, they recalled the green and secluded places where we had gathered them,—the dim woods, "ankle-deep in lilies-of-the-valley;" the warm primroses, that peeped out like buried treasures, from their Winter hiding-places amongst the moss and dead leaves; the cowslips that nodded on many a sunny and breezy hillock; the violets that nestled about the stems of large old forest-trees, and seemed to creep under their own broad dark leaves for shelter, as if they feared their sweetness might betray the place of their concealment; blue-bells that grew in moist and hidden spots, where, saving their own presence, and the pale pearly cups of anemone, which ever waved their delicate and drooping heads before the gentlest breeze that blew—there was

> "An eternal April on the ground
> That made it all one emerald."

For many a journey had we in Spring to gather cowslips; the fields all about Park-house were covered with them; and

often have we pulled up one of these beautiful roots, and counted more than twenty buds which sprung from the same stalk. What a huge handful have we sometimes culled within an hour or two! all smelling so sweet, and looking so lovely, with their deep golden cups spotted with ruby, bedded and resting together, and appearing a thousand times more beautiful than the richest ornament that was ever cut out of the purest gold. Then what a pleasant task it was when we got home, to pull the delicate peeps, or buds from out of their pale emerald sheaths, and to know that when we had gathered and picked a sufficient quantity, they were to be made into that most delicious of all home-brewed beverages, sweet and fragrant cowslip wine! Often, too, at some unexpected corner of a field, during these rambles, we came unaware upon a country maiden

MILKING THE COWS,

and singing as cheerfully over her labour, as the birds that were hopping about upon the boughs among the blossoms: and then we purchased of her many a draught of the warm new milk, which we drank through the creamy foam, that broke, like opening may-buds, about the transparent edge of the snow-white wooden dish; for we knew that the cow which yielded it had herself fed upon the sweet yellow cowslips; and the very flavour itself was rich as honey steeped in a bowlful of delicious flowers. And sometimes across the road, and up a lane that led nowhere but to green fields, to a country that seemed too beautiful ever to be broken up into roads, where it would have been almost a sin for a wheel ever to have crushed those endless and lengthening lines of white daisies, that seemed to stretch onward and onward for evermore, as if they were trying to find their way to the beds of primroses and violets in the distant wood; as if they had for ages formed an old highway of flowers, over which had marched the feet of many thousand bees and butterflies: sometimes crossing over one of these beautiful pathways that lead to the little quiet heavens of this green and beautiful world, an innocent shepherd-boy would pass, driving before him his snow-white lambs, to bleat and feed upon some new and untrodden pasture; or seated sideways upon one of his sleek and well-fed horses, a ploughboy, in his weather-stained smock-frock, would ride whistling along, the long whip dropping listlessly over his shoulder, and we heard the jingling music of the harness, until the sound died away in the distance: and then, saving the singing of the birds, the whole wide landscape would again lie buried in its green stillness; a stillness, amid which even the murmuring of the far-off bee became audible. And ever there went singing along, with low and subdued voice, some clear brook that could only be heard when a rounded pebble checked its course, as if it murmured at being kept away from the flowers that grew beyond, and had come a long way down the hills to look at them, from where the breeze

had first blown the tidings about the beauty of the spot in which they grew; and ever over the stream the drooping may-buds waved, as if they tried to match their whiteness against the silvery cloud that was mirrored below; and here and there great trees threw their green arms across it, chequering its onward course with cooling shadows, as if to give it for a little time a pleasant resting-place, before it went on again to where the golden and unclouded sunshine fell. And where it went broadening out, the gaudy dragon-flies met together to play; and where it went narrowing in, the tufted bulrushes, and the feathery reeds, and the yellow flowers of the broad-leaved water-flags, nodded, and bended, and rustled together, as if they were never weary of telling each other, how pleasant was the spot in which they grew; and little birds took up the tidings, and told them to the blossoms, and the blossoms repeated them to the bees, who were ever murmuring about their fragrance; and the bees whispered the tidings back again into the bells of the flowers; and the flowers breathed them back again to the butterflies, as they sat swinging upon their honied bells with folded wings. Then the rounded dews of twilight came dropping down to see if they were true; and all night long the stars of heaven stopped out to look at them; and the bright moon hung with delight over such beautiful scenes, and the golden beams of the early morning came out of heaven to play there, as if they could find no place so bright and beautiful about the sky. And so do I still look upon the beauties of Nature—to me they are ever clothed in rich and fanciful colours, the flowers have a language which I seem to understand more clearly every time I look upon them; they have made my mind

> "A mansion for all lovely forms;
> My memory a dwelling-place
> For all sweet sounds and harmonies."

I can conjure them up before me at any moment; I can see

them all as clearly mapped out in my "mind's eye," as when I last looked upon them; and such pleasing visions never allow me to feel sad or lonely for many moments together. It is as if my heart in its boyish delight had opened and taken in all these beautiful impressions; and night and day, through all the changes and troubles of life, they are still there, and I can gaze upon them at my will. They are treasures no living mortal can deprive me of.

If you have never seen a rookery, I would advise you, the first time you get into some old-fashioned neighbourhood, where one of these airy cities are built, to visit it without delay, for there you will find much to amuse you. The rooks are all thieves, every man-jack of them! and they think no more about walking off with a beam from another rook's house, and strengthening their own nest with it, than a big thief of a boy does of snatching up some poor little fellow's marbles, putting them into his pocket, and walking away with them. Then these rooks quarrel dreadfully; often getting from words to blows, and, I dare say, abusing each other heartily, in their way, before they begin to fight. I have sometimes amused myself by trying to find out what they were quarrelling about, and have often fancied, when I have seen a couple of poor rooks, returning home with a stick apiece in their mouths (reckoning, no doubt, in their own minds, how many more trips they would have to make before their nest was completed), what must have been their conversation, when, instead of finding the foundation of their nest as they had left it, every stick had been stolen during their absence by a couple of lazy vagabonds, who were too idle to go and fetch the materials with which to finish their building, so stayed at home to steal whatever they could lay their evil hands upon, while their more industrious and honest neighbours were busily employed in rummaging about amidst the fields. I have fancied how annoyed they must have felt when, return-

ing with their last two sticks, they have, perhaps, said to one another, just before they reached home, "Well, never mind! though it is hard work flying such a distance, and bringing back such pieces of heavy timber, yet we have already made above a hundred journeys, and as many more will complete our task; then we shall have such a nice nest of our own, and can go to bed when we like, and get up whenever we please, or at least lie awake; for those low-bred people, who live above our heads in the attics, are always up and quarrelling at the first peep of day, and there is no getting a wink of sleep after; and——but, bless me! how is this? we must have mistaken the bough; and yet that can't be, neither! That must be Black-cap, peeping out over his house-top there; and I know Splay-foot, who lives next door, by his claws; and the other nest belongs to the long-nosed fellow I had such a battle with last Spring—I know him by the scar above his eye, which I made with my sharp beak when we fought, and which he 'll carry to his grave with him. Well—what a shame! I declare, if some of the thieves out of the next street have n't been here during our absence, and carried away every stick and stake that we had piled together, even to the very scaffolding! It 's too bad; that it is! and I wo'n't stand it any longer; so, come along." And they spread out their black wings, and away they sail to the next tree, and alight on the bough next to that occupied by the robbers, whom they have no difficulty in detecting, for the very bulk into which their nest has so suddenly grown, plainly tells that they have not come by the materials honestly. "What do you mean, you scoundrel, by coming and carrying off the whole of my house, while I was away?" commences the bolder rook of the two. "Beg your pardon," answers the black rascal, whose very looks condemn him; "but I thought, as you were so long gone, you had perhaps left this place altogether, to reside in some more peaceable neighbourhood—

for this is but a sorry spot to live in; so, making sure that some other rook would be stepping in and taking possession, why, I took the liberty. Beg pardon; but hope there's no offence." "No offence!" exclaims the injured rook, "take that, you thievish-looking fellow," and he fetches him such a bat on the head with the point of his beak, as sends him spinning on the other side of the nest. "I will thank you not to strike my husband," cries out Mrs. Rook, who has hitherto remained in silence. "Your husband deserves it, and you too, madam," exclaims the injured lady, who has accompanied her husband; "for you are, both of you, dishonest persons." "I would thank you to keep your impertinence to yourself," replies the robber's wife; "for if you do not, you will put me under the painful necessity of compelling you." "You compel me! you dirty, black-looking hussy! You! When did you wash your face last? I 'd box your ears for two straws—that I would, you saucy madam, you!" "At your peril dare to lift up your hand against me!" replies the other; for if you do, I 'll call my relations, and give you in charge, that I will!" "This stick 's mine," says the other, hopping down, and planting her claws upon it; "deny it, if you can. It 's mine, and I 'll have it!" "Not by my consent, madam!" answers the other, also planting her claws upon it. Then battle-royal commences; they pull, they peck, they strike, they thrust; they stop a moment to take breath, and at it they go again. Their husbands are also fighting: all the neighbourhood is up! from every nest there are a couple of heads poked out, looking on the combatants—some crying, "Serve 'em right! Well done! Give it 'em!" Some hovering about in the air, and exclaiming, "Bless me, what a disagreeable neighbourhood this is to live in! nothing but fighting and quarrelling, picking and stealing; really, Mr. So-and-so, I think it's high time you and I moved to a more respectable place; but I 'm glad the honest people have

thrashed 'em, and recovered their own again; and, as the whole colony seem to be up, driving these low, thievish people away, I think it our duty to join them in showing our disapprobation, lest, by our standing aloof, we should be suspected of countenancing the delinquents." There is something pleasing about a

ROOKERY,

when the windy tall elm-trees on which they build overlook some ancient and picturesque hall, where you can catch glimpses, between the openings of the trees, of large bay-windows, and clusters of tall twisted chimneys; where the brown, winding carriage-path runs in and out between the embowered avenue, while behind lie sweeps of soft velvet greensward, which go down to

some smooth sheet of clear water, on which the stately swans are sailing about like little silver ships, so small and indistinct do their forms appear, when seen from the remote distance. In such a spot, with the grey old tower of the village-church heaving up behind the trees, a rookery seems in keeping with the scenery. The drowsy cawing which they make gives a soft and dreamy sound to the landscape, and there is something poetical in the very thought that their ancient household has been reared there, time out of mind,—perhaps ever since the first stone of the old building itself was laid,—and that generation after generation of their dusky race have been swept away, like the long line of heirs who have succeeded each other, have had their births, their marriages, and their funerals; have come in, and gone out from the doors of that ancient hall; even as the rooks themselves have done, between the openings of those tall old trees, which still stand green and high, and looking as unchanged as the building itself, as if the same inhabitants still moved, and dreamed, and lingered there, unaltered amid the brooding quietude, which has slumbered over so many centuries. They also pay visits to the old church, peep in among the inhabitants of the neighbouring village, move and forage and walk about every acre of the estate, as if to see that all was going on as it ought to do,—for no one ever disputed their claim to the proprietorship of the soil, and they look out over the wide estate, as if they were alone the sole owners. Nor will they allow any strangers to build or settle down upon their ancient property; for although they often quarrel among themselves, still, if any intruder dares to occupy a branch within their broad boundary, the whole colony are up in arms in a few moments, and away they rush with their dusky banners outspread, uttering their hoarse war-cry, and sailing on with sharp-pointed beaks, and wing to wing, like brave soldiers who are resolved to storm the enemy's citadel, and carry it at the point of the bayonet.

There is a great difference between the habits of rooks and

crows: the latter are a wild restless race—wandering Arabs, who pitch their tents anywhere in the great desert of the world, enemies to all order, all rule, and all society; they build their nest upon some solitary tree which commands a wide look out, and will sally forth at a moment's notice upon any peaceful passenger, be it a young hare, or a sickly lamb, a stray chicken, or a wandering pigeon, who are unfortunate enough to pass within eyesight of their evil neighbourhood. Nor will they hesitate to give battle to either a hawk, a kite, or a raven, should they venture to approach their nest; and so highly are their fighting qualities estimated by the country-people, that when the cruel and murderous pastime of cock-fighting was more in vogue, it was a common practice to place hens' eggs in the nests of these crows, after having taken away those which the crows had laid, and leave them there to be hatched; and from these eggs were the finest breed of fighting-cocks produced. This is a fact which I have often witnessed, and which I have never yet found mentioned in any work on natural history. Their eggs are rather large and long, and are of a beautiful green colour marked with dark and irregular spots. They are not easily distinguished from the rooks, saving that the bill is more bent, and that there are a few bristle-like feathers growing about the base of the beak. The rooks however, feed on insects; while the crow gorges itself with any kind of animal food it can alight upon; hence it is called the carrion-crow.

What a change has Spring produced both in the streets of the towns and villages! You feel happy whilst gazing upon the number of poor children it has released from the cold and darkness of Winter, amid which they were pent up like so many prisoners. And you can tell by their merry shouts, and the eagerness with which they follow their childish amusements, that the warm cheerful sunshine has caused them to forget for a time all their poverty and suffering. Even the smalles of all, who have not been able to run for more than a few

weeks, have found pleasure in piling up tiny hillocks of dirt; while their little brothers and sisters are busily employed in arranging the buttercups and daisies, which they gathered in their pinafores, heads and tails together, with handfuls of weeds and grass in the green and pleasant meadows: sweet places! Oh! how different to the smoke, and dirt, and squalor, which are found in too many of their miserable homes. The warm Spring evening has, like a friendly voice, called them all forth; and although there are traces of dirt on their young innocent faces, which show how they are neglected by their poor parents, still they bear not now about them those marks of care, which give to ragged and hunger-bitten children such an old, grave, and heart-aching look. What boy, during his walk on a fine Spring evening, has not observed these children of the poor, and watched them engaged in their out-of-door amusements, an hour or so before bed-time? Has not seen two little bare-footed creatures, whose frocks kept slipping from off their shoulders every now and then, busy and happy at their game of battledore and shuttlecock; one, perhaps, had got an old book-cover, the other the hard crown of an old hat, and these were their battledores; while the shuttlecock, which they struck with so much delight, one after the other, was, perhaps, formed of a cork, in which they had stuck a few feathers that had fallen from the half-starved hens which pecked about that poor and wretched-looking neighbourhood. And yet those children were just as happy with such make-shift toys, as they would have been with the grandest that ever came out of a tempting toy-shop. They jump up just as high at each stroke, and laugh just as loud as you would do were you playing with the richest presents that you ever received on your birthday. And is it not a pity that those poor children, who are now so happy and so innocent, will, for want of that education which you are favoured with, and for that watchful care which your fond parents keep over you, be left to wander about wherever they choose: untaught and uncared

for, will many of them run from street to street with Lucifer-matches to sell, or from door to door begging a mouthful of bread; or mingle with other children, who through bad examples have fallen into evil ways; who never had a fond mother to kneel down before while they said their prayers, ere they retired to sleep, or a kind father to take them in his arms and bless them when they arose in the morning. Oh! you would shudder if you could but trace the future career of many of those poor children whom you see on a warm Spring evening so playful and happy, in spite of all their dirt and rags, as they emerge from the courts and alleys where they have been shut up all the winter long. I know I am writing to warm-hearted English boys, possessed of noble feelings, and I am sure that when they pass these poor neglected children they will feel sorry for them; and that if ever they possess the power in after-life, they will lend their aid in establishing schools, and endeavouring to alleviate the misery which hangs about those wretched courts and alleys, and such kind actions will bring their own reward. For who can tell how many children might grow up to respectable men and women through being able to read such books as are written for you; but who, for want of education, wallow in the filth, and darkness, and ignorance amid which they were born: and where no one ever came to teach them right from wrong, or good from evil? And when you are men, and in business, if some poor little fellow comes, with his hair peeping through the hole in his cap, his little cold toes showing like the heads of mice through the holes in his boots, his jacket shorn of half its buttons, and his corduroy breeches fastened up with string, do not, if he inquires whether you want an errand-boy, speak cross to him, because he is so meanly clad, or send him away because he has never before been in a situation; for you know not how good, and willing, and honest, and industrious a boy may be found under that ragged covering. In the dark and dirty mines they dig for, and find, gold;

amongst the dead leaves and withered weeds are the sweet violets often hidden; in the shells of ugly fish are found pearls; and if from the good old proverb you are taught that "every thing is not gold that glitters," so may you, on the other hand, be sure, that every thing is not dross that looks like it; and that many a good boy has been a lost man because he was unable to make a respectable appearance at his outset in life. I would not give a pin for a boy who has not courage enough to judge for himself, and to form his own opinion, even when it differs at times from that of others.

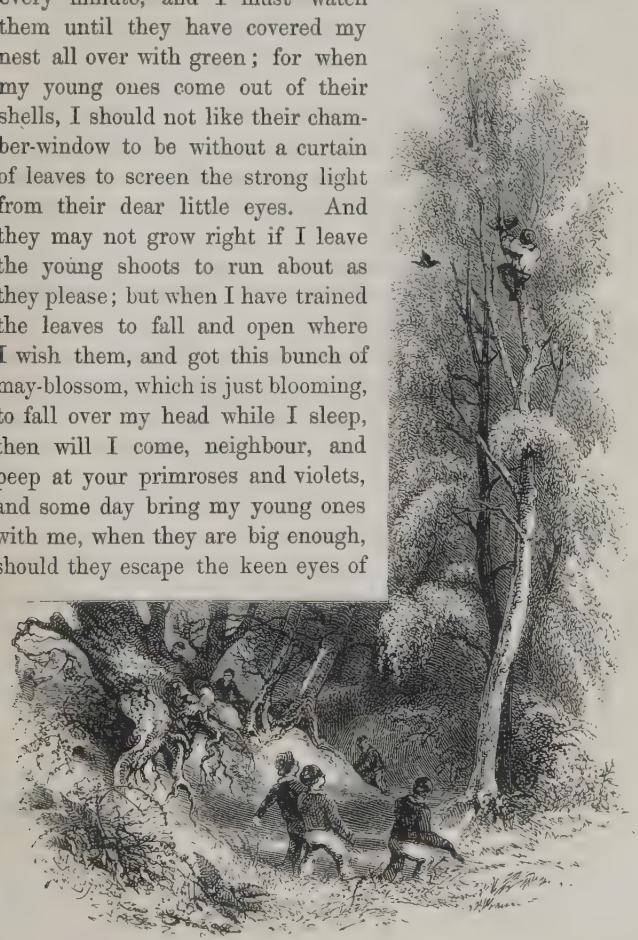
I remember, when a boy, wearing my father's cap and feather, and sash and sword, for he had been an officer in the volunteers; but whether I played the part of Napoleon or Wellington, or led on the French or English in our games, I never would countenance the rejection of a poor little playmate because he wore a ragged jacket; but rather would decorate his torn sleeve with white paper, and make a sergeant of him: and no boy could muster so large an army as I could, through enlisting such lads as prouder boys were ashamed to play with. Their little hard dirty hands never hindered me from placing in them the white broken bits of pot which enlisted them for soldiers; no, not even if they wore the coarse grey livery of the workhouse; for workhouse children were allowed to come out and play in those days: and many a time have we exchanged our white bread for their brown; ay, and eaten it too. They knew where the choicest birds built, and the finest flowers grew; and who like them to climb the high hawthorn hedges, and bring down the sweetest boughs of may, branches on which the first sunbeams of morning broke, and on the topmost twigs of which the little birds got up to sing their morning hymns. Was I better than they were, because my father had once been a merchant, and owned ships, and called wharfs beside the river his own; and kept a banker's account, and had once carried his head high amongst the people,

who, because they are rich, the world considers them alone respectable? Not at all. His ships were wrecked, the bank broke, and I became one of the children of the poor; their companion, their playmate, the leader of their games; for they loved me, and I loved them. No rich boy could have been happier than poverty made me. I often thought of the once wealthy banker, who became a drivelling idiot, and went about with his hat turned upside down, with his stockings hanging about his heels; and who, when asked why he wore his hat so, would reply that "the world was turned upside down with him." Poor fellow! our little fortune was lost through his failure, and he became an idiot, and I one of the children of the poor. But for these changes I should never have been able to write for you as I do now—never, perhaps, have been nursed in the iron school of adversity.

How merrily do those little, ragged fellows trundle their hoops along! I wonder what they did with themselves during the long winter-nights! Perhaps, poor things, they were sent to bed soon after dark, to save fire and candle, as is frequently the case amongst the very poor. Here they are spinning their tops. How kind it was of that old gentleman to step off the pavement, rather than tread within the ring they have made! Depend upon it, from the smile which passed over his good-natured countenance, so pleasing a sight recalled his own boyish days. Here, again, they are busy at hop-scotch, or hop-bed, as it is called in some parts of England. How beautifully that little girl balances herself on one foot! with what judgment she strikes the smooth piece of broken pot with her shoe, as if she could feel the distance, as she struck it from the centre of one figured square to another: it passes even the narrowest of all, for none are difficult to her. What a colour such healthy exercise brings into her fair face; and how soundly she will sleep under the thatched roof of her little cottage, after her play

is over! Marbles are turned out of their hiding-places; drawers are hunted over for fishing-tackle; bows and arrows are once more called into use; the skeleton of the great kite is taken down, and covered with paper; and one thing after another is brought forth, to be again cast aside in its turn, for Spring has brought with it such long days, and so many pleasures, that, out of such a number, we scarcely know which amusement to follow first. There is the little garden to dig up, and the seeds to be sown, and there are wild flowers to gather in the fields, and birds'-nests to peep into in the hedges, and the osier-peelers to watch beside the river, and the bark-peelers, who are at work in the great woods; to look at, and see them strip from off the trees all their beautiful mossy bark, and leave their trunks white and naked upon the ground: and anglers are now busy among the streams, and the bees will be swarming, and the young rooks dropping out of their nests, and, above all, the old birds have begun to lay. And some of them sing so sweetly that you might almost fancy you could understand what they say! that one was calling to some near neighbour, and exclaiming, "Just come and look, and you 'll see the sweet blue-violets, and the pale golden-primroses, peeping out from amid their green leaves, and sending up such a delicious perfume all about my nest, that I cannot sleep a wink after day-dawn. So sweet is the scent which breaks my slumber, I 'm forced to get up, and sing for joy." "I cannot come now," answers another; "I am watching the white blossoms on the hawthorns break through the snowy pearls and green emeralds in which they have been so long wrapped up; and I love to count how many pink, and how many pale ones, blow together in the morning. And there is a little bed of blue-bells at my feet, which are growing more blue, and more beautiful, every day; and all under the bank above which I have built, the ground is golden with the sunshine of the celandine; and the

little buds keep breaking out of their green sheaths about every minute, and I must watch them until they have covered my nest all over with green; for when my young ones come out of their shells, I should not like their chamber-window to be without a curtain of leaves to screen the strong light from their dear little eyes. And they may not grow right if I leave the young shoots to run about as they please; but when I have trained the leaves to fall and open where I wish them, and got this bunch of may-blossom, which is just blooming, to fall over my head while I sleep, then will I come, neighbour, and peep at your primroses and violets, and some day bring my young ones with me, when they are big enough, should they escape the keen eyes of



BOYS BIRDS'-NESTING:

and while they chase each other in and out among the may-bloom and the woodbine, we will sit apart, and watching, teach them the same sweet tunes which we were taught to sing, and which are as old as the hills, and yet ever fresh as the flowers of Spring."

For assuredly the birds must think of something while they sing; and what can it be, unless it is about their nests and their young ones, and the flowers, and the cheerful sunshine, and the rounded dew-drops which fall all night long on the silken plumage of their wings? Some think that the birds sing only to express their love to each other, and to tell how happy they are together. Perhaps it may be so; for it has been remarked, that they often sing all the sweeter after they have had a quarrel and a fight, and perhaps that is their way of making it up again. For we know that, even amongst ourselves, little brothers and sisters will sometimes peck at each other; then kiss, and become friends the next minute. But to show you how kind birds are to one another, I must tell you, that whilst the female bird is sitting upon her eggs to hatch them, the male bird seldom stirs far away from her; but will perch upon a bough near at hand, and sing to her, seeming to say, "I know, my dear, you must stop at home and keep your eggs warm, or the young ones will all die; but never mind, it will not be for long, and when they are able to fly, and provide for themselves, we will have many a happy ramble again through the green woods; and until that time comes I will never leave you." Some think that the old birds teach the young ones to sing, the same as mothers teach their children to talk. But this can hardly be true, for their young ones are only just able to chirp whilst they are under the care of the older birds; nor is it until the following Spring that they begin to break out into song. We might as well conclude that they also taught their young ones how to build their nests, which we know is not the case. Trifling as these things may appear, they serve

to convince us that there is some great and secret power at work "who doeth all these things;" and that power can be nothing less than the wonder-working hand of God. Oh! what happy days did we spend during the primrose season of Spring! what rambles we had down Humble-car Lane, and Lea Marshes, and up Foxby-Lane, and over Double Hill, and by White's Wood, and Somerby Wood, and over Corringham Scrogs, and among the dark trees in Long Plantation, and up Thonock Lane, and among the hedges on Castle Hills: over the bridge, and in the fields about Beckingham, and Bole, and Sawnby, and Wheatly; by the Delf Banks, among the water-flags and bulrushes; past Cape's ropery, with its high old hawthorn hedges, in Parnell's osier-holt, with its crumbling brick bridge, and weather-stained sluice-gates! Oh! I feel as if I could jump up out of my arm-chair now, and run off, without once stopping, to visit those dear old sweet familiar places, and hunt every hedge and bush once more for birds' nests, as I did a quarter of a century ago. I will no more believe that my heart whilst ever it beats, can either grow old, or cold, or cease to pant and yearn for those delightful spots, which are ever green with the pleasant memories of my boyish days, than that they will cease to be covered in Spring and Summer with milk-white daisies, and sun-dyed buttercups, or hemmed in with pleasant hedges, powdered over and perfumed with the blossoms of may. I will never believe but what the river sings and murmurs as sweetly through those evergreen and winding banks, as it did when I was a boy; and that the silver-sounding bells ring as cheerfully from that old grey and weather-beaten tower, as when I listened to them in my childish years, and sighed, because my companions could not feel so happy as I did. I can never think that the water-flags around that deep, silent pond, will ever be without a reed-sparrow's nest, or that the hedge-sparrows will ever cease to build, and lay their sky-dyed eggs, in the hawthorn hedges, which surround Gate Burton

I cannot think that the throstles will ever forsake those dark firs in the old plantation; or the

BOTTLE-TIT'S NEST

be ever found so beautifully built, as amongst the thick under wood, which grew over the wild blue-bells that waved there; or that the blue-winged jay will ever fly away to build any where but in Lea Wood; for although I have grown older, the fond remembrance that is yet rooted there, is still ever young, and dances its fresh, green leaves in the wind and sunshine, as if the bark on its stem was yet unwrinkled, and not a tuft of moss had clung to its storm-beaten trunk. I would gather all the birds that ever sang about me in my boyish days, if I could, and thought that they would become my companions, without either repining or complaining; for I should fancy when they sang to me, that they were telling me all about the old hills and woods we wandered over years ago, and for which our loves would still be mutual; and sometimes we should be very glad, and very sorrowful together, and close our eyes in the same twilight, and dream about the same old familiar scenes, for we should be all prisoners alike, longing for the same summer green, they and I, sending every beat of the heart after things that were far away. And yet, not so! for even with closed eyes I can look through the dim avenues of

old years, down the grey twilight of time can I gaze at my will, for nothing there is wholly dark; the sinking sunset is gilded over with pleasant memories, and even in sleep they steal forth, to visit those beloved haunts, to bring me back tidings about the flowers that are budding, and to comfort me when I awaken; and this is my reward for never having forsaken them. I never threw my dead flowers away to be trampled under foot by the rude passer-by, but laid them reverentially aside, covered them with dead leaves, and buried them in Autumn under some favourite bed, believing that they became a portion of those which appeared again in the following Spring. If I carried home a little bird, and brought it up tenderly, when I heard the rough winds piping over the grave of Summer, I knew it had no stormy sea to pass over, to escape from the biting cold of the coming Winter; and I consoled myself through knowing that I had saved its tiny wings from many a weary beat; and then I could carry my prisoners whenever I pleased into a large and pleasant garden, and hang up their cages in the thickest green of the trees, and that made them more happy than if they had only unmeaning dead walls to look upon. I knew that no sharp-toothed martens, such as skulk about the shadowy branches in the woods, could spring upon them unawares and devour them; that they would never want for food, however severe the winter might be; that I was kinder to them than the elements, which forced them to seek a change of climate over wide and perilous seas; and, if they seemed very restless when the sweet Spring came, and hanging them up amongst the beautiful apple-blossoms made them no happier,—if they would not come to me when they were called, and hop, and peck, and gambol in my presence, I invariably restored them to liberty.

Hawks and owls I dealt less tenderly with: I knew they were cruel by nature; that if once free they would commit murder by wholesale, that many a mouse would cease to

squeak, and many a bird to sing. Over these I reigned with an iron hand; and sometimes when I heard a sweet bird sing, I said to myself, "Perhaps the prisoner I have now in safe keeping would, had he been abroad, have put a stop to thy sweet piping;" for I had, during my rambles, seen many of these sharp-beaked, and strong-winged fellows, take a walk through the sky, and look round as if they were only admiring the prospect below, when pop, without leaving the little songster time enough to say "Oh deary me," they would drop down like a stone, and commence murder, with no more compunction than a fallen apple would feel for the poor caterpillar it had crushed to death.

And now, before I offer any further defence about capturing and caging birds, I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with their habits, conscious that no kind-hearted boy will ever voluntarily neglect or injure one, after he has read all I have got to say about them; but that if he ever does take, and confine them, it will be for the love of having such beautiful and wonderful companions about him, that he may become better acquainted with their habits, and watch their little ways: for I believe such objects tend to soften, instead of harden the heart; and shall, after having described their various methods of building, give my reasons for such belief.

To make you acquainted with those wonderful structures, birds' nests, I must first endeavour to point out the difference of style in which they build; showing you how some, like masons and miners, hew and cut their way into rocks; how others imitate carpenters, and saw, and measure, and fit; while a third follows the example of plasterers, and mixes together a strong cement, which it spreads smoothly over its little chamber; a fourth imitates the manufactory of hats and cloth, by felting and working together the materials into a solid body; others, again, are as clever as if they had served a long appren-

ticeship to weavers, so beautifully do they work together their habitations; while some are excavators, and make holes in banks, or in the earth; and many there are who, following the examples of the basket-makers, cross and weave the twigs together in an endless variety of strong and beautiful forms. All these builders on trees, on banks, on the faces of rocks, on the eaves of houses, upon and within the ground, I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with. Hurdis, in a beautiful little poem entitled "The Village Curate," written about half a century ago, in describing a bird's nest, has said,

> "Mark it well, within, without,
> No tool had he that wrought, no knife to cut,
> No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert,
> No glue to join; his little beak was all,
> And yet how neatly finished! What nice hand,
> With every implement and means of art,
> And twenty years' apprenticeship to boot,
> Could make me such another?"

Amongst the mason-birds we must place the window-swallows, about which you will find a long account towards the end of the book of Autumn, where I have entered fully into the way in which they form their cemented nests, their habits, and the manner in which they assemble together before their migration. Of these Shakspere has said that there is

> ——— "No jetty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle."

And to this class of builders belongs the thrush, whose sweet music is scarcely excelled by any singer in that large and beautiful band which every day give free concerts to their assembled audience of leaves and flowers, in the green old summer woods: for the throstle forms her nest among trees and shrubs, first building the round outward structure of moss, straw, or hay, then lining the inside with a coating of rotten wood, which it

again covers over with a smooth lining of soft manure, that, when hardened, is almost as clear, and level, and round as the inside of a teacup; all this it accomplishes with only its little feet, breast, and bill, and thus is formed the

NEST OF THE THRUSH.

I shall select from the number of mining birds, who like the rabbit burrow and make holes in the banks, a species of swallow, different from that which builds on the eaves of houses, and which is known to naturalists by the name of the bank-swallow, or sand-martin. The bill of this bird is short, strong, and sharp as the points of a compass; and, by planting its sharp claws firmly on the face of a sand-bank, it will peg away with its little head and bill, which it brings down every time like the fall of a pointed pickaxe, loosening the sand at every stroke, that comes rolling down into the ditch or road below, as fast as it is loosened or pecked away. In order to form the whole of its nest round, its claws are planted in the centre, as you would fix one of the points of a pair of compasses; and thus it stands, working its head round and round, its feet acting like a pivot, on which it turns, and so forms a perfect circle; and works on, until it has formed a hole of from two to three feet deep, by

scratching out the sand which its bill has loosened, with its claws. It then places at the bottom of the hole a little dry grass and a few small feathers; and in this cavern, which its little beak and feet have hewn out, it there deposits its eggs. Frequently, however, when it finds the face of the quarry or sand-bank too hard, after having commenced its hole, it will fly off in search of some spot where the embankment is of a softer nature, leaving the old hole unfinished, and commencing a new one. They are naturally social birds, and hundreds of them will build their nests together within the space of a few yards, thus forming a colony under ground, as the rooks do in the trees above the earth: numbers of them build about the neighbourhood of Greenwich and Blackheath. The grebe, which is also another ground-builder, I have given a lengthy description of in my book of Summer. The stormy petrel, a bird which the sailors meet with miles out at sea, in the roughest weather, also builds its nest in a similar manner. Jackdaws, too, occasionally build in the holes in rocks; and the beautiful kingfisher, also, makes its nest in some hollow of the bank beside a stream. The skylark evinces great wisdom in building her nest upon the ground, so that the wet shall either be drained off, or by forming the coarse and loose foundation to absorb the moisture without penetrating to the warm inner ground on which its eggs are deposited.

Amongst the basket-making birds are the jay, the bullfinch, the red-winged starling, the raven, the crow, and the rook; together with several of our smaller singing-birds; such as the whitethroat and yellowhammer. Nor do they select such materials as the willows or sallows which are woven into baskets; but often with only dead, broken sticks, or twigs, they contrive to weave together a strong skeleton of basket-work, which it is almost impossible to take to pieces without breaking the materials of which it is formed.

But, perhaps, the neatest of all our basket-making birds is

the missel-thrush. It weaves together the stems of plants, grass, and moss, somewhat carelessly at first on the outside, though nothing can exceed the neatness with which it twines and smooths together the rough ends in the interior of its nest; carrying neatly round the longer stalks of dried grass, and even interweaving the slender twigs of the tree on which it builds, without breaking them off. The

WOODPIGEON,

which also belongs to this order of builders, erects so slight and open a nest, that I have frequently, while standing beneath the tree, seen the two white eggs shine through the skeleton floor of basket-work. I have also occasionally seen the eggs lying down broken at the foot of a tree after a high wind; for so flat and shallow was the nest built, that when the branches rocked to and fro in the breeze, the eggs rolled off as they would do from a plate when it was tilted aside; this you will not

wonder at when you come to examine the engraving of the

NEST OF THE WOODPIGEON.

I also well remember, when a boy, picking up two unfledged young ones, which had fallen out of their nest, one windy afternoon in Spring. One was killed by the fall, and as the other was too young and naked to carry home, I placed it carefully in my cap, climbed the tree, and deposited it again in its cold open nest. A few days after, I paid the tree a second visit; and on climbing up, found that the other nestling was also dead. Whether the weight of my hand had disturbed the form of the nest, and caused the old birds to forsake it, and thus leave their little one to perish, or whether it received such injuries through its fall as prevented its recovering, I could not tell; although I have known several instances of birds forsaking their nests through the hand only having been inserted while searching for eggs, even before the bird had commenced laying; and this I believe is particularly the case with the wren and the neat-building pink, who, if she only finds a flake of moss standing different to what it did when she quitted the nest, invariably forsakes it. Indeed, all the felt-making birds, to which class this belongs, and which are the prettiest of all builders, as you will see by the following engraving of the

NEST OF THE GOLDFINCH,

can, from the peculiar neatness of their nests, easily detect the slightest disarrangement. They are called felt-makers through the texture of their nests resembling that of a hat, or a piece of woollen cloth; for so are the materials interwoven together, each minute thread or hair being worked or bedded in, even as a hatter would commence forming the woollen body of his work. Wool, moss, lichen, tufts of cotton, and the barked scales of trees, and spider-webs, are all massed and matted together in beautiful uniformity by these wonderful birds; and so particular is the goldfinch in putting a high and smooth finish to her work, that she will scarcely leave one single fibre of moss projecting beyond another, so neatly and smoothly is the material fitted together. All boys know, who have examined fur, wool, or hair, through a microscope, that they present a very different appearance to what they do to the naked eye; being full of fibres and rugged projections, all admirably adapted for bedding together, when they are once pressed down and rolled in Hence the firm adherence and beautiful appearance which the felt-making birds are enabled to give to the smooth and finished linings of their nests.

Another class of birds are called dome-builders, because they erect a roof over their nests; and the most commonly known to country-boys, amongst these, is the nest of the beautiful little jenny wren; this bird will sometimes carry a piece of moss in its beak nearly as bulky as itself. Amidst the larger birds which are dome-builders, may be classed the magpie; and every boy who has been a birds'-nester is aware of the difficulty of getting at the magpie's eggs, on account of the small aperture, and the sharp prickly roof which the bird has thrown over its nest; and I well remember seeing a

MAGPIE'S NEST

in a crab-thorn hedge, which ran beside my uncle's orchard at Thonock, so large, through the immense roof which was piled above it, that altogether it would almost have filled a good-sized sack. But the magpies who had brought up, and had driven out, several successive families of young ones in the same nest, seemed to know that they were allowed a long lease of the premises, so had added to their old nest, and built and repaired it year after year, until it was almost impossible to approach the inner chamber of their building.

And now I am sure I have said enough to prevent any boy

from ever wantonly taking a bird's nest, merely for the love of destroying it. I will not say that he ought never to take one at all, because I think it would do him more good than harm to become acquainted with their curious structures; and if he brings away an egg now and then, but leaves one or two behind, the bird will never miss it; though if he takes them all, she will forsake her nest. As to young birds, I have taken and reared many in my time; and now I will enter into my reasons more fully for so doing.

I know that there is no end of well-meaning people who raise a cry against birds'-nesting as a great evil, and a great sin, and one which is ever accompanied by excessive cruelty. Against all this outcry I have many good reasons to oppose. A kind-hearted boy would as soon think of killing one of his little brothers or sisters, as an innocent bird;—nay, he would shed tears even for the death of the latter; and if he was instrumental in killing it at all, it would be through excess of kindness. All children love rabbits and birds, and kittens, and little dogs. No fond mother can use her babe more tenderly than they do all these little things; and I firmly believe, that those who have been most indulged in keeping such little pets about them in their younger days, can never, as they grow older, become hard-hearted. I kept and reared young birds when I was a boy, got up at daybreak to gather them worms, fed them with a little at a time, many times within the hour, and placed them by my bedside at night, so that I might, with the first peep of dawn, or even before, if I heard them chirp, get up and feed them. True, I never took them from their nests until they were almost able to fly, and could nearly peck, and provide for themselves: then I had also the experience of older people, who had reared young birds for years, and I obeyed the instructions they gave me, and no boy lost fewer birds than I did in a season: and as to young blackbirds and thrushes, I verily believe that I kept

them better than ever their parents could have done; for I loved them: and oh, how proud I was when they could peck, and would take the food out of my mouth, as many have done! Remember, I never took the half-naked little unfledged things, not even when they were "double-penned," as we used to call it; and through this forbearance I allowed many a nest of young ones to escape: nor would I meddle with the smallest birds. They were generally great gaping throstles, and blackbirds, which I took: red-throated fellows who could devour almost any thing; and I seldom lost one, for I used to turn out in the cold grey dawn of morning, and get them such a can full of nice fresh worms and grubs from under the dried manure in the fields, that they lived like princes. And where could their mothers get such melts, and bits of red raw beef, and choice white bread to feed them with, as I did? Then I had such cages! so large, that they were as much as I could lift up, to hang them on the nails out of doors in the morning sunshine; and those cages I cleaned out every morning, sanded them, and put in fresh water, and covered the tops all over like beautiful arbours, with such green plants as the birds loved to peck, so that the people who passed by used to envy my birds; and I have often seen the wild birds settle down upon the cages. Mind, I never took young birds till they could almost peck. Some say, their parents moan and pine after them. So they might do for a week or so; but after that time the old ones would not care at all about them; for when they have once left their nest, they never return to it again, and I don't believe the old ones ever care a straw for them a month after they can provide for themselves. While they are very young, their kindness and attention is unlimited; but I have seen old magpies fight and peck at their young dreadfully, if they offered to come near the old nest after they were once turned out to provide for themselves. I never tried to rear very little birds, saving once a nest of grey linnets; and

I kept one of the brood about seven years, and all the rest lived for a long time. The hens, of course, we turned loose after the first year, when we found they did not sing. I do not believe that it is either wicked or sinful to keep and rear young birds, if a boy does it for the love he bears them. The cruelty consists in making them prisoners, and then neglecting them; but only a bad-hearted and unfeeling boy would act so. A kind lad would care more for his birds than his play. And oh, what pleasure it used to give me to see them come hopping off their perches, and hold their heads, first on one side and then on the other, when I called to them; and to see the delight they showed when they heard my voice, and the flutter they made to get nearer me! and I believe now that they were as fond of me as I was of them,—that they knew I kept them only for love, and felt that I behaved as well to them as their fathers or mothers would have done at that age: for to me they were ever young. I never went out for a walk without bringing home something nice for them. I never let a morning pass, no not even the sabbath, without attending to them. While Spring or Summer produced any thing green and beautiful, I decorated their cages with it. In Winter I kept them warm and comfortable; and while many a bird perished with cold and hunger in the fields, mine were fat, and warm, and well housed, and well fed. If one chanced to die, I made it a coffin, dug it a little grave, engraved its name on a piece of slate, and placed a monument over it,—nay, sometimes honoured its memory with the best verses I could write,—missed it, and felt unhappy for days after; and I am sure its parents could have done no more, if they would have done so much. Surely this was neither cruelty nor unkindness; and if it was a sin, I am sure I shall be forgiven for it; for if one or so did die rather young, and a jury of old birds could have sat upon its body, and I had been allowed to make my own defence, they would have returned a verdict and said, "This little bird

died through excess of love, and through having been brought up too kindly; and although we do not agree altogether with the diet it received, yet many a humane nurse has erred through the same kind feeling, and sent many a pretty babe to kingdom come, through over-dosing it with Godfrey's Cordial." In a word, I have still the same boyish feelings now; and I can no more help hunting for birds' nests when I go out into the country for a ramble, than I could twenty-five years ago; and I have several boys and girls who in this take after me; and not long ago one dear boy lay sobbing and crying all night long, because one of his rabbits had died—through excessive fatness. But I never allow them to take very young birds; and our prisoners have generally consisted of such as we have purchased from men and boys in the streets. If I have taken a few eggs, and a few nests occasionally, it was never through motives of cruelty: "not that I loved them less, but nature more;" and, as good old Izaak Walton says about fishing, "I always handled them as if I loved them, tenderly." Although I would not kill a little white innocent lamb for the wealth of the world, unless I were famishing with hunger, and nothing else could be had, still I would keep a bird, and treat it as tenderly as I would a dear little child; believing that if it is a vice, it is a very innocent one, and that a boy will have to journey a long way through life to find a less. All young girls have fond and tender hearts, and I would have you ask your little sisters if it is wrong to love, and feed, and rear, and keep, beautiful little birds; if they say it is cruel, and unkind, and sinful to do so, never on any account keep them: for depend upon it they are right, and I am wrong. If they earnestly dissuade you from keeping them, do so.

But I must tell you something about the habits of hive-bees; for Shakspere has beautifully called them the "singing masons," that "build roofs of gold,"—has compared them to

"soldiers that sally out, and rob the velvet buds of summer of their sweets," which, he tells us, they "bring home with merry march;" and poets, in almost every age, have enriched the beauty of their descriptions, by images drawn from the habits and customs of bees. Often, before they swarm, an unusual silence has been observed in the hive, which, naturalists have supposed, is caused through their feeding, and making a hearty meal, and resting themselves before they set out on their journey. And, as a proof of this, the crops of those which swarmed were found filled with honey, while such as remained behind were comparatively empty. Also, previous to swarming, a number of male-bees may be discovered on the outside of the hive, as if waiting until the sun shone out that they might take their departure. When the queen-bee first breaks out from her cell, she endeavours to get at the cells in which the rest of the queen-bees are enclosed, that she may destroy them; for, by some unaccountable instinct, she cannot bear to have a rival queen near her. She is prevented, however, from destroying them by the male-bees, who are on the watch, and who, whenever she approaches the cells in which her rival queens are enclosed, pull, and drag, and bite at her, until they drive her away: and a pretty rage she gets into I can tell you; for she runs about from one bee to another, as if she said, "Am I to be mistress here or am I not? because, if I'm not, I'm off; and that's the long and the short of it. I'm not a-going to be annoyed by those lazy hussies who are in bed, I can tell you, and who, when they get up, will be turning my house topsy-turvy. A pretty hive, indeed, we should have of it, with three or four mistresses, all ordering about! But really, I've worked myself into such a passion, and am so hot, that I must go out and have a mouthful or two of fresh air." And out she goes, accompanied by a whole regiment of bees; and this is the first swarm. A few days after her departure, up stairs march two or three more heavy bees; and,

knocking at the chamber-door of another of the queens, who still remains behind, they exclaim, "Come, madam, get up: there's too many of us here—you must be packing. We've so many lodgers in the house that we're forced to sleep two or three in a bed; and that'll never do, you know, this hot weather; for the close breathing of so many of us causes the wax to melt and run down the bed-curtains: so get up and get your breakfast, and be off with you; for there's a whole lot of idle fellows who have done nothing but eat and sleep for this last day or two, and the sooner we are rid of them and you the better." And up she does get; and you may fancy in what sort of a temper after so much abuse as this; and after trying, but in vain, to get at the rest of her sisters, who are still in bed, to kill them, she is also driven out, as the queen was before her; and this completes the second swarm. Sometimes, during the summer, three or four swarms will, in this way, leave the hive, each party headed by their queen-bee, until the numbers are so much thinned within, that they are no longer enabled to prevent the remaining queen-bees from quitting their cells; and then it is that battle-royal commences. Nor is there ever a moment's peace in the house while two queens remain alive under the same roof; but when all the rest are killed, the surviving queen sits quietly down upon her throne, and, for another season, reigns peacefully over her loving subjects.

The working bees are divided into two classes,—namely, into nurse-bees and the wax-workers. The nurse-bees feed and take care of the young grubs, also putting a finishing touch to the combs and cells which the workers have commenced; confining themselves, also, more within doors, and seeming to throw all the care and trouble of bringing in provisions to the hive, upon the wax-workers, as if they had quite enough to do in looking after the baby-bees. When bees begin to build their hive, they divide themselves into various companies,—one brings in materials for the labourer, another

band places them in a proper form, and a third company supplies the labourers with food; for they are not allowed to leave off work and go to their dinner. When a labouring bee is hungry, he bends his trunk down, which is quite as well understood as if he rang the bell, and called "Waiter," the attending bee comes up, opens his honey-bag, gives the labourer a few drops, then hastens off to another; and so on, until the whole are supplied. But, were I to tell you half the wonderful things I have heard of and read of about bees, the subject would occupy many pages of my book: I shall therefore recommend you to read "Rennie's Insect Architecture," where you will find all about bees, and many other insects, clearly and simply described. I must not, however, omit to tell you, that when the bees quit their hives, and begin to swarm, the old women in the country rush out with their frying-pans and warming-pans, and commence beating upon them, and kicking up such a ran-tan-tan, that the sound is almost loud enough to break the drum of a deaf man's ear; but whether it causes the bees to settle down any sooner, or not, is a subject which I cannot undertake to decide. When, however, the bees have once settled down in a heap, like a great bunch of raisins stuck together, there is no difficulty in whisking them off, all of a lump, into an empty hive, covering them over with a cloth, and carrying them safely home; when, in a few days after, you will see them issuing out of their hive and buzzing about among the flowers, and returning home again laden with honey, just as if nothing had happened. I have described the grand state in which the queen-bee rides forth, surrounded with her troop of attendants, in the "Book of Summer."

Many a healthy out-of-door game had we in Spring, when we used to set each other "craggens," as we called it, although I never heard the word used anywhere but in the north of England; and a crag, you know, is rough and difficult to get over: hence, I suppose, the origin of the word, from our tasks being

rough and difficult, and often hard to accomplish. Many a time have I led the way in

LEAPING OVER A FENCE.

and it was not the lot of every little playfellow who had the courage to follow me, to escape as I did; for some of them would, perhaps, graze their legs, or come tumbling across, head over heels, or catch the top of the fence with the soles of their shoes, when, if the rail was tender or rotten, down it came before them; and oh, what bruises and falls they sometimes got! and although the pain often forced the tears into their eyes, still they had courage enough to laugh, rub their ankles, and set off again at full speed. So we went over hedge and ditch, bush and fence; nor was a good-sized gate any bar to us, for, by placing our hands on the topmost rail, long practice had

enabled us to throw ourselves clean over it, and across the fields we scampered; our speed increased all the more, perhaps, through hearing some farmer hollaing to us from the neighbouring farmhouse. And, oh! you have no idea how the barking of a great dog helped us across wide dikes, which, at any other time, we should have shrunk back from; for it made us prefer the risk of a ducking, to a bite in the heel; and more than once have I known the old farmer, who pursued us with a long whip in his hand, pluck up courage enough to leap; and, not being so light-footed as we were, splash he would sometimes come into the middle of the dike, while we ran away, laughing, and left him to get out as he best could. Nor would we, if once a fair distance from him, and a good stick or hedge-stake chanced to lay near at hand, hesitate to turn round upon the dog, who, when he found that we presented a bold front, would turn tail, and hurry off back again as fast as he came; for a dog seems to know a coward by instinct, and, unless urged on by his master's voice, will generally decline the contest when he finds that resistance is offered. Not that we were ever taken up for trespass, if even we were caught; for I believe many of the old farmers liked the run as well as we did; for, after all, we but trampled down a little grass, or broke a rail now and then, which was soon repaired where timber was so plentiful: besides, we enjoyed our amusement all the more when there was a little risk to be run; for we really did no serious injury, and such escapes only added to that courage which it is necessary every brave-hearted boy should possess, who has to battle his way through the difficult ins and outs of this busy world. A whimpering, fearful boy could never remain long our companion, without catching some spark of that fearless disposition which we prided ourselves in possessing. A dishonourable action we would never for a moment countenance;

nor would we ever desert a brave companion because he had fallen into some innocent scrape: and if, during these harmless trespasses, they captured one, they captured all—for we never ran our heads into the slightest danger without first binding ourselves to be true to one another. It is true we sometimes got into a scrape, and perhaps all remained prisoners together, for half an hour or so, in some barn or outhouse; and then, perhaps, the old farmer's wife would intercede, would bid her husband remember, that "boys would still be boys;" that it was as natural to them to run over fields and hedges as birds to fly, and that he was just as bad when he was a boy: and then we were liberated, under condition that we were not to jump over or break down the fences again; which promise we generally kept until the following Spring. Not that I would wish boys wilfully to trespass or take the liberties that we did, unless, like us, they were well known to the parties, who were more ready to look over than punish our little delinquencies. "Could n't we confine ourselves to the footpaths?" the farmer would argue. We promised that we would try; but, bless you! it was of no use; our feet fairly itched again to be beating about the long grass and the trailing flowers. Besides, how could we get to the hedgerows to look for birds'-nests, without first trespassing by crossing the fields? And then, again, we argued, "What harm could we do?" for, by such time as the grass was long and ready for mowing, most of the young birds had flown; so that, when we really should have been doing an injury, the occasion which tempted us to trespass had passed away. Such were our boyish arguments; for what clever lad cannot find a reason for what he does, and level down some little rough point which stands between him and his boyish pleasures? And I am sure my young readers will not like me a jot the less, if I make a clean breast of it at once, and tell them that such actions as these never either lay

heavily upon my conscience, or broke my sleep; and if I look upon them now with a feeling of regret, it is only because they have passed away, and that many of my brave companions, whose laugh was the loudest while they joined in these bygone and harmless sports, are now numbered with the dead. And I doubt not, but that the daring spirit which those robust exercises tended to foster, have, in an after day, caused many a bright eye to look calmly out upon the angry ocean, when its heaving waves rose high, and to stand, with unblanched cheek, in the stormy front of battle; for the heart that never quailed in the boy, would be the last to sink when danger fronted the future man. Nor less amusing was our game of

THREAD-MY-NEEDLE;

or, as it is called in the country, "Duck-under-the-Water-kit;" and often at the Christmas and Easter holidays, our fair cousins and sisters were permitted to join us in this healthy exercise, for which we required a good range of ground. The way in which we played at this old-fashioned game was this,—two of us held up a handkerchief at arms'-length, one taking hold of each end, and keeping it nearly tight; under this the next couple passed, and, halting two or three yards from us, they also held up their handkerchief, as we did ours; a third, a fourth, and a fifth couple went under in the same way,—sometimes as many as fifty of us; and a pretty sight it was to see that long arcade of handkerchiefs, of all colours, arching across a country road, and held by as merry a group as ever sent their deep laughter through the green lanes. When all had passed through, it was then their turn, who had stood up first in the game; and away they went, at full speed, beneath that varied avenue of silks, cottons, and lawns, and soon came out at the far end, where they once more took their station, and formed an arch for the others to pass through. Few, unless they had seen us, would believe how soon we managed to run over a mile of ground: as to cold, we were too agreeably occupied to think about that, and too much in motion to feel it.

But I cannot part with my boyish companions without making you acquainted with an adventure which befel myself, conscious that every right-minded boy would have acted as I did, had he been placed in a similar position. And thus it happened, on a Christmas-time, many long years ago, that I had gone out to spend the evening with a party of young friends, to which other of my schoolfellows and playmates were also invited, and where, by the permission of their parents, we were allowed to stay rather late. All boys who are at all acquainted with old books, or old country customs, must have heard of the mummings and maskings which take place at Christmas: how the shades of Robin Hood, and Maid Marian, and Friar

Tuck, and Little John, are again revived; and how many an old wardrobe is ransacked of its antique finery for such occasions. One of my boyish companions who, alas! is now dead, had joined a party of merry maskers at another house, and, as he had to represent the character of Robin Hood, I lent him my father's sword to give a finish to his warlike appearance. It was agreed upon between us, that he should leave his party at as early an hour as he could, and come to ours, and there return the sword which I had lent him, instead of taking it to my home. All of which was done as we had decided. We broke up at a late hour, for Christmas comes but once a year, and, although it was not past midnight, it was late for us. It was a fine moonlight night, and as the snow lay white, and bright, and beautiful upon the ground, some of the boys who were before me could not resist snow-balling one another; and as one was attempting to give the other a roll in the snow, they chanced, amid their good-tempered struggle, to tumble together with a loud bang, against the front door of a house, in which another party were also spending their merry Christmas. By such time as the door was opened, they were off round the corner, and out of sight; and there was I alone, unconscious of what had happened, with my hands in my pockets, and the naked sword thrust under my arm; for during the many games we had had in playing at soldiers, the leathern scabbard had long before been worn out. Out rushed two or three gentlemen, and without making any inquiry, all began at once to accuse me of knocking at the door. I, of course, denied it; when one young gentleman, not much older than myself, using very harsh language, seized hold of me; and, in the excitement, I struck his arm with the pummel of the sword. Three or four men's hands were upon me in an instant, and inside I was dragged, and the door closed, even before my companions had missed me. "Would I beg pardon?" "No! I had done no wrong." I refused. "If I did not strike the door, would I

tell who did?" "No." "Was I not sorry that I had struck the young gentleman who had seized on me?" "No; he had called me a liar, and were my arms at liberty, and he were to repeat the accusation, I would strike him again." "I would do nothing, then?" "No; I had nothing to beg pardon for; neither would I betray, or give up the names of my companions. I had done no wrong, and they might do their worst." For, although not more than thirteen years of age, I had a proud and stout heart in a good cause. The constable lived but a few doors off, and he was sent for. Poor old fellow! I think I see him now, in his rough shaggy coat, with a spotted cotton handkerchief tied about his ears, the staff of office with the awful crown upon it in his hand, gaping as if not well awake, and wondering whether it was for robbery or murder that he was dragged out of his warm bed at that untimely hour. There stood I, the daring culprit, wanting some inches to make me five feet high. The charge was repeated. "I had said my say; I had no defence to offer; no apology to make; I had done no wrong." The gentleman, in whose house I was now a prisoner, was a man of great influence in the town; and it was more than the poor constable's place was worth to refuse to take me into custody. My English blood was now up, and after again refusing to beg pardon, and boldly telling them "a piece of my mind," I strode off, with a proud step and a haughty heart, cheerfully to prison. I could have run off if I had chosen from the poor, pursy, short-winded old constable, and soon have left him far behind, but my proud soul rebelled at such an act; I knew I had done no wrong. Poor old fellow! he followed, coughing at every step, his perforated lantern throwing a hundred rays of light upon the snow; he put in the great key, and with a harsh grating sound the heavy door flew open, and there was I a prisoner. After lighting a good fire, and asking me if I should be frightened to be left alone for a few minutes, while he went home to get a drop of something to

comfort him, and to fetch his tobacco-box, he departed; and there was I, at last, a real solitary prisoner, made fast by bolt and bar. I well knew that my mother would feel no uneasiness about my absence, as I had frequently slept at the house where I had spent the evening; and as to my companions, I had no doubt that, after having run on a little way and not seeing me come, they had concluded that I had returned home in another direction. The old constable returned, and bore me company; and after chatting with me a little time, whilst he smoked his pipe, and finding that I began to grow sleepy, he persuaded me to lie down upon the trucklebed which stood in the prison, and throwing his rough coat over me, I was soon sound asleep. With daylight came my mother, for I have no doubt but that the party who had caused me to be so unjustly imprisoned began to feel uneasy about the matter, so had told her where I was. I was firm, and determined to see the end of it. And although the worthy old magistrate lived above two miles off, he was sent for. He came, and I appeared before him. I need not say how he reprimanded the party who had so unjustly caused my imprisonment; nor how the kind-hearted old man read a portion of a long act to me, out of an old law-book, to show that I had done wrong in carrying an unlawful weapon through the streets at midnight. And so, after many apologies from the party who had so wrongly acted in causing my brief imprisonment, my adventure ended. But it was with great difficulty that my uncle could be dissuaded from bringing an action against the party, for he vowed he would see me righted if it ruined him: although I endeavoured to persuade him that all the wrong I had suffered was in sleeping for a few hours on a strange bed in a prison; and for this I had my reward, in the consciousness that I had neither done any harm, nor yet betrayed my companions; who, I must add, came nobly forward the next morning, and pleaded guilty to the paltry offence of which I was accused.

But the narration of my boyish adventures is carrying me away from my descriptions of Spring, with all its birds and flowers, beautiful scenes, and sweet sounds, none of which delighted me more than the low dreamy cooing of the

STOCK-DOVE,

as we used to call one of our native wild pigeons, which built just such an open and careless nest, as I have before described to you. Montagu tells an anecdote about one of these wood-pigeons and a magpie, which, he says, is an old Suffolk fable: "The magpie once undertook to teach the pigeon to build a better nest; but the pigeon kept crying out, 'Take two, Taffy! take two!' The magpie kept still proceeding, like a good workman, with only one stick at a time, though the stock-dove still called out, 'Take two, take two!' which cry at last so annoyed the magpie, that he exclaimed, 'I say that one stick at a time is enough; and if you think otherwise, you may finish the work yourself, for I will not.' So mag left the stock-dove to complete the nest after her own slovenly manner.

There is a very ancient rhyme—I cannot tell you how old it is—which says,

"April showers
Bring May flowers:"

neither can I tell you the names of half the flowers that they do bring; but I remember well, when a boy, I used to set out alone to try how many different kinds of flowers I could gather in a single morning, confining myself to only two or three of the same kind; and I have often returned with a whole handful, many of the names of which I did not know, but amongst them were the clover-flowers, white and red; daisies, of every tinge of crimson; buttercups, yellow as gold; great marsh marigolds, as big as the brass buttons on my grandad's coat; primroses, pale, sweet, and beautiful; lady-smocks, "all silver-white," as Shakspere has described them; a beautiful flower that we called the crow's-foot; orchises, that looked like bees, and resembled, in form and colour, other insects; cowslips, still my favourite amongst wild flowers; lilies of the valley, with which our woods were covered; violets, oh, how sweet! anemones, that seemed to grow everywhere; the ivy-leaved speedwell, ever beautiful; arums, which we called lords and ladies, and robins and bobbins, and which, when children, we rarely ever gathered without repeating the following lines, though what they had to do with the arum I have yet to learn:—

"Robin-a-bobbin, a bilberry ben,
Eat more meat than threescore men;
He eat a bull, and eat a calf:
Then under the hedge
He did himself wedge,
And vowed he had n't enough by half."

This curious plant, I must tell you, is also well known in the country by the name of "Robin-in-the-hedge," for under hedges it is most commonly found. Blue-bells we could lie down and roll in, for the neighbouring plantations were covered with

them. Then there was the yellow and starred celandine, that is so often mistaken for the buttercup, which it only resembles in colour; and the saxifrage, purple and white. These are about all I knew the names of, when a boy; for I must not include the blossoms of the sloe and hawthorn, and the golden buds of the gorse, in my wild posy, although I seldom failed to stick a sprig of each in the centre, where they towered above like the plumes of a tall chieftain. Then I gathered numbers of others whose names I am unacquainted with, even now; and every year I still keep adding to my stock of knowledge, as you will see in my description of Summer and Autumn, where I mention a few more of the flowers which bloom at those seasons of the year; for there were not so many cheap and good works descriptive of flowers, in my boyish days, as there are now, and such as there were, chiefly contained hard Latin names, which I could not clearly understand; so I went blundering onward, like a bee, from one to the other, and gathering knowledge about them as I best could. But I became acquainted with many old men and women who were herbalists, and whom I often talked with while they were out gathering herbs and flowers; and from them I learned many things which, otherwise, I should never have known; for there are many healing virtues in plants and herbs which are highly beneficial to man. And some of those old herbalists used to make me smile while they talked about these things, and how such and such herbs were only good when gathered at certain hours, and under certain planets, which I was very hard in believing in. And I believe now that our ancestors only said that we must wash our faces in may-dew before the sun arose, to give us a fresh colour that would last, that they might induce us to rise early in the mornings, and not lie in bed after the sun had risen. For, in those old-fashioned days, they breakfasted at six, and dined at eleven; and they used to say, that

"Early to bed, and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Thomson has in one beautiful line described the boundary which divides, yet seems to blend into the two seasons, and in which he describes a country

"Half prankt with Spring, with Summer half-imbrowned."

The truth of this line will strike every boy, who looks upon the change which every week produces towards the end of Spring. He will no longer discover the short green grass which grew side by side with the daisies; but in place of this will observe how the grass itself has grown up into flower and seed, tall and grey, and rustling beneath every breeze that blows, and already ripe for the hay-harvest. He will notice a brown rusty look upon the may-blossoms, which tells that their beauty has departed with the expiring Spring. He will see that the fine light green, which gave such a tender freshness to the foliage of the trees, is deepening into the darker umbrage which Summer hangs over her bowers: he will notice how many flowers have already faded and died away, and how others of a richer bloom and deeper dye, are stepping in to fill up their places; he will observe how many a bird that poured forth its full-throated melody through April and May, is hidden and silent somewhere in the leafy coverts of June; for even the nightingale, that favourite bird of the poets, which singeth all night long, is only heard in Spring, while it chants "in shadiest covert hid," loving especially those places where the tall spotted cowslips grow. Sweet it is to wander forth in these pleasant evenings, and to watch the moon journeying on, like a lonely traveller, over the unbounded plain of heaven—when we cannot see what flowers we are treading upon, for the shadows that sleep beneath the trees. Then to know that the same song has been listened to, by kings and queens who have passed away long ages ago; perhaps had made glad

"The sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home
She stood in tears amid the alien corn,"

whom we read about in the Bible. To know that great poets have listened to it, and written in its praise—that Milton has said even "Silence was so pleased," she became more hushed while hearkening unto it, is surely to make us more in love with the song of this beautiful bird, about which I could quote as many exquisite passages of poetry, as would fill a dozen pages of this book. But whilst I am thinking about the poets, I will give you Spenser's description of a butterfly, that set out for a whole day's pleasure, and what he did with himself, and where he went to. Spenser you know wrote the beautiful poem which is entitled "The Faery Queen," and which you ought to read on account of the many exquisite descriptions it contains, of sweet country scenery, and knights in armour who fought many battles, and old enchanters who went about doing mischief, and the fair Una who was followed by a milk-white lamb, and sometimes had a lion for her companion, with many more wonderful and romantic things which I have not space to tell you about. But lest you should dislike his old-fashioned mode of spelling words, and not clearly understand some of his beautiful images, I will turn his description of this butterfly that went out for a long day's pleasure, into common prose, bidding you, however, to remember that all the beautiful thoughts are Spenser's, and not mine. Well then, "This butterfly being all ready dressed (as you well know), got up from the flower on which he had been sleeping all night, and giving his mealy wings a shake, just to scatter the dew off them, set out for a day's pleasure. He went on over the fields at a good pace, and whenever he soared a little higher than common and saw the whole wide country, he said in the lustiness of his heart, 'I possess all, there is no one to gainsay me, no one to envy me. I can feed bounteously upon every flower that stretches out before me.' Then he went over the woods, and rivers, and the

meadows green, with his air-cutting wings; he tried the mountains and the rank grassy fens, but none of these seemed to please his dainty fancy, so he hurried off into the gay gardens, where he knew he could riot to excess. When he arrived there, he began to fly about from bed to bed, and from one border to another, surveying every thing with his curious and busy eye, but only tasting tenderly, without disordering any of the flowers, or even defacing their silken leaves with his light and delicate feet. Sometimes he sucked at the sap, sometimes at the dew which still lay on them like rounded pearls, and in it he also bathed his feet; and so having breakfasted deliciously, he settled like a folded pea-blossom upon the branch of a flower, to rest and sun himself a little while, and to dry his moistened wings, which you know would be rather wet after dabbling about in the morning dew, on which he breakfasted." But I am sure I have quoted enough to make you like Spenser's writings, without extracting more, or naming all the flowers which the poet enumerates that he he lunched and dined upon, and amongst them, in one beautiful line, he mentions

"The roses reigning in the pride of May."

And then having summed up this kingly banquet of rich flowers the poet says in another beautiful verse, which I shall not alter, for it is so much like asking you what can be pleasanter than a delightful ramble into the country, where for the time you may fancy, like the butterfly, that every thing around is your own,

"What more felicity can fill a creature,
  Than to enjoy delight with liberty,
And to be lord of all the works of Nature?
  To reign in the air, from the earth to highest sky,
To feed on flowers, and weeds of glorious feature?
  To take whatever thing doth please the eye?
Who rests not pleasëd with such happiness,
Will worthy be to taste of wretchedness."

Although we cannot trespass like the butterfly, and take what ever pleases us, still we can enjoy more delight amid our liberty, than any beautiful insect can appreciate, because we are gifted with higher powers of enjoyment, can look up from creation to the Great Creator, and understand more of this wonderful world. But the butterfly reminds me of the woods in Spring, and the

WOOD-CUTTERS

and bark-peelers: men who had a forest-like smell about their garments; who, week after week, rain or fair, went out every morning into the woods, and never returned again until night, but spent all the day among nests, and birds, and flowers,—who saw squirrels run above their heads, and rabbits across their path, without wondering,—who talked about foxes, and polecats, and badgers, and weasels, as if they were but every-day objects; and brought us home nests full of little, white, downy owls, and sharp-beaked hawks, that pecked savagely at our finger-ends, before even they were half-fledged: men who sat down on the trunks of large old

trees, which they had felled, and ate their meals,—who stripped the bark of a tree which contained a nest-full of young ones, quite as unconcerned as if no such little home had been constructed among its branches. Proud was that boy, who was a favourite amongst the bark-peelers, who was privileged to enter the woods at any time to peep into the great stacks of branches and bark which they had piled together, and to hunt for nests amid the thick underwood which they had left untouched, saving around the stems of the trees they had barked. Then there was a strange, wild, and ghastly look about that part of the wood where they had stripped naked all the trees; it looked like a land filled with great white skeletons, made more striking through the surrounding gloom which remained untouched, for it seemed as if an unnatural light fell upon the unearthly forms which had so suddenly sprung up amid the silence and solitude of the forest. Many a pleasant ride had we in the wagons, to and from the woods, to fetch home the bark, as load after load was brought and deposited upon the wharfs by the river-side, ready to be shipped off, and sold to the tanners, who would be unable to make the leather we wear so durable, unless the oak-trees were barked for this purpose. Oh! what a treat it was to ride home on those high and heavily laden wagons, to lie flat down on the load, and feel the topmost boughs of the trees sweeping over our backs, as we passed through the woods, to touch the ends of the high extending branches with our hands, and to know that the wings of wild birds were all that ever before swept over those sprays—to be nearly on a level with the nests which we saw amid the branches, and to touch the end of some bough that projected from a huge, bulging, and knotted trunk, up which we had never been able to climb! These were indeed delights, such as only a thorough-bred country-boy can fully appreciate.

Snakes were also there, which had awakened from their wintry sleep and come out from under dead leaves, and the

hollow roots of trees; and these we saw basking in the sunshine on sandy banks, in the warm and open corners of woods, and on heaths and commons, near water-courses; where they fed upon young birds, eggs, mice, and small lizards, but above all upon the poor little frogs, which appear to be their favourite food. The snake lays eggs which are fastened together by a glutinous matter, often consisting of as many as twenty in number, and these are left to be hatched by the heat of the sun, on a warm bed of leaves, some sunny spot on the bank, or very frequently on a dung-heap, just where the snake chances to deposit them. You should only see one in pursuit of a frog; how the poor little thing tries to leap away, taking shorter and shorter strides every time it jumps, and uttering a shrill pitiable cry, as if it said, "I know it 's no use trying, he is sure to have me at last—oh deary me! I see his long jaws open, his bright unmerciful eyes fixed upon me; two or three more leaps and I am done for! and now he has got hold of my hinder leg, and now I feel I am going bit by bit, first on one side, and then on the other,—oh how dark it is getting! I can scarcely see at all, one more movement on the right side of the jaw, and another on the left, and then I 'm gone for ever." And sometimes it has so chanced that when the snake has happened to gape, after it has swallowed its prey, the poor little frog has jumped out of its mouth again, all alive and kicking, and made its escape. There are instances on record of two snakes seizing on the same frog at a time, one commencing with its head, and the other with its hinder feet: and oh! did n't they shake one another when their heads chanced to meet, until at last one gave the other a bite on the upper lip, no doubt also making the poor frog squeak a little harder, as if it said to the other snake, "There, take that for your share," while he very leisurely swallowed his victim whole. Oh, what beautiful swimmers they are! carrying the head and neck above the water while they pass through it, and gliding here and there with all the ease and

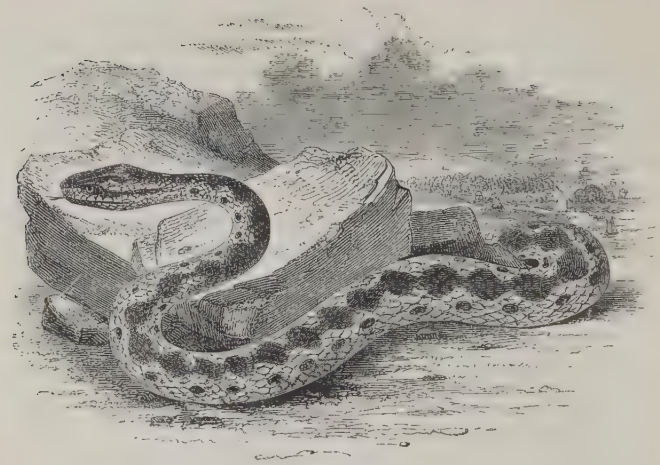
freedom of an eel. Then the snakes cast their skins too, shoving the head and neck into some small prickly cavity, either between the close and tangling branches of the bramble, the speary points of the sharp thorn-bush, or the biting and armed sprigs of the furze or gorse, which lay hold of those portions of the skin that are already loose about the head and neck, as you might with your fingers lay hold of the top of your stocking, and thus turn it inside out, at the same time you pulled it off; for so does the snake get rid of his old coat, and without either going to be measured, or troubling the tailor, he glides away with the new one already made upon his back. The

COMMON SNAKE

is perfectly harmless, and may not only be tamed, but will also readily distinguish those who feed it: and Mr. Bell, in his "History of British Reptiles," says, that he had one in his possession which knew him from all other persons, and which would come out of its box, crawl up his coat-sleeve, and there

lie still, enjoying the warmth which his arm afforded it: that it would also come to his hand every morning for a draught of milk, of its own accord; but would hiss and fly at strangers if they attempted to meddle with it. Snakes are sometimes found three and even four feet in length; and are in every way as harmless as an eel, for they possess not the poisonous and venomous fangs, which belong to the viper.

And now I must tell you that the Viper is the only poisonous and venomous reptile known in England, and that it bears in appearance so close a resemblance to the harmless snake, that I am afraid were I to attempt to describe the difference in the two, you would still not be able to distinguish them, however carefully I might do it; for it is not true to say that all vipers are black, for some of them are marked even more beautifully than the common snakes. But dangerous as the bite of the viper may be, I believe that there are very few instances, if any, on record, in which it is known to have produced death. I shall however, by the aid of the work I have already alluded to, endeavour to make you acquainted with the formidable fangs by which the poisonous bite is inflicted. Instead, then, of the outer row of teeth which are found in the harmless snake, the viper also possesses on each side of its upper jaw two or three long, sharp, curved teeth, the largest of which is attached to a small moveable bone, and can easily be erected by a muscular power which the reptile possesses. Unless when angry, this dreadful tooth falls back, and rests upon the jaw, where it is co vered by a fold of skin; but when about to bite, it is shot out, and projects downward in a moment, where it stands firm as the point of a spear. And down a groove which runs along the tooth, the poison is shot from a bag, which is connected with its root, and, at the very moment it bites, is struck into the wound: and when this is the case, the safest remedy is to rub the part bitten with oil, and to swallow a small portion of ammonia. When the



VIPER

is about to bite, it draws up its body into a close coil, bends back its neck as if to gather more force, and then darts forth its head in an instant,—so quick indeed, that you can scarcely perceive the action; for the bite is inflicted, and the head again withdrawn, all in one brief moment. I have only to add that boys should be very careful in handling snakes, for it is not easy to distinguish them from vipers: so the best plan is to allow them to escape, for neither the one nor the other will meddle with you, if you let them alone.

Although with all their poverty, I believe that the children of the poor pass their time more happily than those amid walled cities; yet many of them undergo great hardships, and suffer many privations, such as are undreamed of by boys who have only passed their lives in the streets of busy towns; and I will tell you how a little sister and brother were often left for days together, while their parents wandered about the country hawking goods, by the sale of which they obtained a

livelihood. They kept a little tilted cart, and a rough shaggy pony, whose uncombed and uncurried hair turned up and down, and was matted, and knotted, and twisted together in hard lumps; for it had never been rubbed or cleaned down from the first day it was purchased by them. The dirt had gathered about it through dragging its heavy load along cross-country roads, and was left to dry on, or fall off, just as chance directed; or when the pony took it into his head to have a roll now and then upon the road, or to give himself a hearty shaking, by way of variety, just as the humour possessed him. And sometimes the pony, children, and cart were left for days together on the edge of some broad open common, by the side of some wild uninhabited moorland, or the skirts of a wood, or at the end of some green and remote lane; while the pony, with a long rope attached to his leg, and the other end fastened into the ground with a strong stake, picked up what he could within the limits in which he was secured, until the spot around was nearly eaten bare, when the peg was again removed, and he was permitted to graze in another new and limited pasture. And often while their poor parents wandered away with their heavy loads upon their heads, from village to village, they left their children a loaf or two within the cart, a little coffee, oatmeal, and sugar, a tin saucepan, and a tinder-box; and as they always contrived to leave them near some clear water-course, and as there was plenty of dried fuel to be found about the neighbourhood, they managed in the best way they could; and in the Spring time they frequently wandered away from the cart, to gather the wild flowers which grew around, and to watch the little birds which built and sung, and flew in and out of the wild bushes, trees, and hedges. But little Nell was not so hardy as her brother Ned, and as one Spring chanced to set in very wet, and as they were but poorly clad, and poorly fed, and neither of them had shoes to their feet, she caught a dreadful cold, and suffered under a

severe cough, which soon settled down upon her lungs, and she became very ill, and lost all spirit to play. Although Ned doubled the little rug which covered them at night, that his sister might be warmer, while he himself laid upon the straw at the bottom of the cart without any thing over him, still she could not sleep, but lay coughing all night long; and he often got up in the night, lighted the fire with the furze-bushes which he gathered on the common beside the wood, and made her something warm to comfort her; but all was of no avail. It was on a Wednesday night that the rain came down heavily, pouring in through the holes of the old weather-beaten tilt which covered the cart, until it drenched the straw on which the poor girl lay, and soaked through the rug that covered her. She complained of cold and thirst, and he got up as usual to kindle a fire, but the rain had filled the tinder-box, and he could procure no light. Soon after daylight on Thursday morning she died; and all he could do was to sit beside the dead body of his little sister in the cart and weep, for he knew that his parents would not return until Saturday night, and if he put the pony into the shafts, he did not know where to go in search of them: and he was fearful they would not know where to find him when they returned; so he had nothing to do but sit down and cry beside his dead sister in the cart. Night came rainy and dark, and he was still alone, with no one to speak to him now; and although he was very cold, he felt that his sister was colder, and doubled up the rug, to make it thicker, to keep her warm, until his parents returned; for he thought she was still asleep. Poor little fellow! he was too young to know what death was, for no one had ever talked to him about death or heaven; nor had he ever before seen any one dead. Sometimes he thought he would try to awaken her; but then he knew he could not kindle a fire, nor get any thing warm to comfort her, so felt glad that she still slept; though he could not help weeping bitterly when he spoke to

her, and she answered him not. "She will be sure to be hungry and awaken in the morning," he thought; and putting the wet tinder into his bosom to dry, he laid down beside her, and long before daylight he had sobbed himself to sleep, holding her thin cold hands between his own. Alas! he knew not that little Nell would never awake again. When he awoke on the second morning after her death, the sun shone out bright and beautiful, and the little birds were singing their sweet anthems from the neighbouring wood, and the primroses upon the banks opened out broad and beautiful; and having kissed her, and spoken to her, and found that she did not answer him, he got up to gather her a posy of wild flowers, thinking how much they would please her when she awakened; for those which they had collected together, before little Nell was taken ill, lay withered, and drooping, and dead beside her, in the cart. When he returned, and found she was not yet awake, he put them upon her bosom, and placed them between her hands, thinking how pleased she would be when her little eyes opened, and the first thing she saw was such a beautiful posy of sweet-smelling flowers. The tinder-box was now dry, and he lighted a fire, and prepared their breakfast, as he had many a time done; and when all was ready, he shook her, and tried to awaken her; but the wild flowers only rolled from off her bosom, while her arms dropped down stiff and motionless, for he knew not that she had no power to move; so he left the breakfast untasted, and sat down and wept again until the evening came.

That long night passed away like the other in sorrow and in silence; and although no one came near him, neither had he heard the sound of a human voice since she last spoke, yet he was not afraid, for he felt that his sister was still with him, and he knew not that the sleep she slept was the long unbroken quietness of death;—even had he known, he had no cause to fear, for she who lay so tranquilly beside him had ever loved him,

with almost more than a childish love, for he was a year older than his sister, and they had been left alone so often together, that little Nell would have wept more for his absence, than she would have done for her parents, had they remained away for weeks together; for the father and mother were so poor and were so much away, that the children knew not what the comforts of home were, had never celebrated a birthday, or sat down to a holiday-feast in their lives, nor partaken of those endearments and household affections which so many of you enjoy. Roughly nursed, and having had from childhood to battle their way through the hardships of the world, their parents took neither thought nor care about treating them differently to what they themselves had been treated; believing wrongfully that hunger and hardship are the only heritage of the poor; for they possessed not the finer feelings, which teach us that the bitterness of poverty and privation may be sweetened by the tender offices of love. Not that their parents were naturally hard-hearted; but nursed in the cold, hard lap of poverty themselves, and left at an early age to beg, or starve, or earn a livelihood as they best could, they wrongfully considered that they did their duty if they only provided their children with food, which was almost more than their parents had done for them. Further, they had imbibed an evil habit of drinking, a vice which they never endeavoured to uproot, and by so doing, they spent many a shilling which would have added to their children's happiness, and which might have provided them with a good education and a comfortable home. But these were things which they themselves had never known, and never cared to feel the need of; so they went on, just living from hand to mouth, and storing up no provision for the morrow, and there are too many in this world like them. All those two poor children had ever had to make them happy, was the love they bore to each other, sweetened by the pleasure of rambling about, and gathering flowers in the sunshine, and chasing the birds and butterflies about the

wild woods and heaths, wherever they chanced to be stationed, until their parents chose to return.

And now Saturday came; but poor little Ned was so weak, through not having tasted any food for the two preceding days, that he was unable to leave the cart; and when his parents returned in the evening, they found him lying down beside his dead sister, holding one of her cold hands within his own, and weeping bitterly. And when they gazed upon little Nell, they thought how grievously they had neglected her, and wished that she were alive again that they might behave more kindly to her; but all their wishes and tears were now in vain: and from that moment they began to act more tenderly towards the child that was still remaining behind. They had no family grave to bear her to, for their parents had been buried in some close city churchyard, amid numberless other unknown and crowded graves; neither had they any money to pay for her funeral, or they would have buried her in the village churchyard which lay not far distant from the place where she died: so the father dug her a little grave near the pleasant greenwood side: no solemn bell was tolled, no peaceful prayers were breathed over her innocent body, but where the sweet birds sung, and the wildflowers waved, and the long leaves whispered to the passing breeze, there heaved up the green turf that covered the grave of little Nell: and over his sister's grave Ned planted the fairest primroses; and many a summer after did their parents come there, with their little cart, and often in the solemn stillness of the sabbath might the voice of Ned, who was now able to read, be heard, reading passages from the holy Scriptures to his parents, while they sat, silent and attentive, gazing upon the grave of little Nell;—for although they still led the same wandering life, a great change had come over them since her death, and they often talked about her long brown hair which streamed out when she ran here and there in the sunshine, and of those little bright eyes which will never open again until the

last trumpet sounds, and the dead are awakened from their long sleep. The spot where little Nell was buried, to me, had always a solemn look; for, near it, there flowed an old river, whose banks were frequented by the

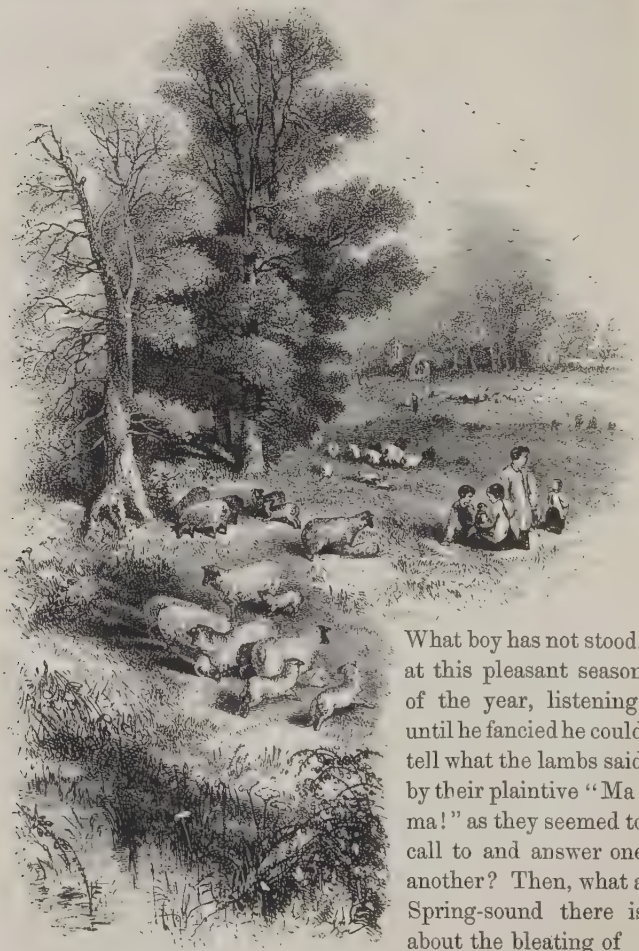
CURLEW;

and on the air, its shrill wild whistle seemed to float like a wailing sound; for so it appeared to me, while I gazed upon that little grave. And there we often wandered, in search of the curlew's nest, which we generally discovered built upon some dry spot on the ground, and formed of grass and leaves, in a very slovenly manner. The eggs were of a pale, olive hue, spotted with brown; and the young can run almost as soon as they are hatched. This bird is rather beautifully marked, the head, neck, and wings being of a pale brown, but in the middle of each feather varied by a black mark, then edging off into a light colour; while the breast is dotted with long black spots,

and the tail and upper coverts of the wings are barred with yellowish white and black. Its cry is very peculiar, and there is something very wild about it, when heard mingling with the murmuring of the waves on the sea shore, which it frequently visits in Winter, to feed upon small crabs and marine insects.

There is another curious bird which I must make you acquainted with, and that is the Nuthatch. And if you were to hear him pecking with his sharp beak against a bough in the wood, as we often did, you would fancy that somebody was striking one of the trees with a hammer, such a loud and successive tapping does he keep up, as he walks round and round the bough; for he is like a fly, and can just as well stand with his feet up as down; while you expect every moment that he will fall with his back upon the ground and break it: but he knows better than that, and keeping a firm hold with his sharp claws, he pecks away with his heels uppermost, and makes all the wood ring again. Oh, you should see how soon he will work a hole into a hard nut, which he places in some hollow in the bark of the trees, while up and down goes his beak like the head of a hammer; and he will sometimes cut a filbert as clean across the middle, as if it had been split by a sharp instrument. Some say this sound is produced by the woodpecker; but as this bird generally selects a soft wood to peck a hole in, I scarcely think it would make so loud a noise as the other does while hammering at a hard nut. The Woodpecker is, however, a beautiful and curious bird, richly marked with black and white and green and a dim yellow, and it will peck out a hole in a decayed tree as round as if it had been worked out with a pair of compasses, and at the bottom of this hole it lays its eggs, and brings up its young ones: and I have known boys cruel enough to block up the hole with a handful of clay, after having watched the old bird enter; as if, by such a foolish act, they hoped to capture her, which is very difficult, as the hole is too small and too deep to thrust the hand in and get at the eggs. The woodpecker is very partial to ants' eggs, and you may occasionally see them busily employed in

feeding about an ant-hill. They lay four or five beautiful little eggs



What boy has not stood, at this pleasant season of the year, listening, until he fancied he could tell what the lambs said by their plaintive "Ma! ma!" as they seemed to call to and answer one another? Then, what a Spring-sound there is about the bleating of

YOUNG LAMBS IN THE FIELD.

How amusing it is to watch their dams, to hear their answers; as if they said, "Well, well, I'm here; I wo'n't leave you. You should n't run off so far to play;" and then she continues to nibble the short, sweet grass, which as yet is scarcely higher than the milk-white daisies, until she is again disturbed by the "Ma! ma!" of her little runaway, who has, perhaps, been running a race with a lot more little white, woolly companions, none of whom are above a month old. Then three or four of them miss their mothers all at once, and, oh! what a bleating they do but make, as they run about here and there, and every where, scarcely knowing what to do; and when they do find their dams, they are so delighted that they seem almost ready to leap out of their skins for very joy. And then you could almost imagine, as the old mothers rub their heads against the lambs, uttering a low, internal sound, that they were chiding them for going so far; for, how can we tell, whilst they recognise each other's voices, but what they can even understand what is said, and, in their way, converse together. Bloomfield, in his beautiful and simple poem, entitled, "The Farmer's Boy" (which I earnestly beg of you all to read), has given a most graphic description of young lambs racing, a few lines of which I here quote:—

> "Each seems to say, 'Come, let us try our speed!'
> Away they scour, impetuous, ardent, strong,
> The green turf trembling as they bound along;
> Adown the slope, then up the hillock climb,
> Where every mole-hill is a bed of thyme;
> There panting stop; yet scarcely can refrain,—
> A bird, a leaf, will set them off again;
> Or if a gale with strength unusual blow,
> *Scattering the wild-brier roses into snow,*
> Their little limbs increasing efforts try."

You will not fail to notice the beautiful line which I have marked in italics. Just fancy a sudden gust of wind blowing down in a moment a whole shower of the blossoms of the

wild roses from the hedge, and driving them over the grass like a snow-drift! What a consternation such an unexpected movement must create amongst a dozen or two of little lambs, who have never before witnessed such a sight! What a running and a scampering must it make amongst them! and if sheep do laugh at all, how the old, fond mothers must enjoy such a scene! But, to gaze on such pleasant pictures as these, is only one amongst the many delights of Spring; for, not only is the eye delighted, but every other sense is also gratified. We inhale the fragrance of the hawthorn, which, of all delightful smells, is, perhaps the healthiest and the sweetest; we hear on every side the singing of the birds, making together such a varied concert, so low, and loud, and sweet, that, together with the rustling of the young leaves in the wind, the softened murmur of the glittering waters, and the swaying of countless thousands of field-flowers of all hues to and fro, we seem to be out in a fairy world, a region of enchantment, a grand garden, only walled round by the sky, and in which we may wander onward and onward for evermore! Then what signs of future plenty do the orchards hang out! what visions of cherries, and pears, and plums, and apples, do we see in the silver blossoms! We can half fancy which will be a red-cheeked apple, by the crimson with which the bloom is dyed; and, as the season advances, we can trace the rounded green of the cherries, which we know a few weeks of sunshine will make mellow and ruby red, and we unconsciously lick our lips, and take off our caps, as if we felt a bumping pound dropping heavily into the deep lining! Then come those thick-beaked bullfinches. Oh! they are such thieves! Bless you, they eat pounds and pounds of cherries before they come to perfection, for they prefer them green and without the stones; and a dozen or two of these great thick-headed fellows will strip nearly every fruit-bud off a cherry-tree in a single morning.

You need only look under one of the trees on which they have been feeding, to satisfy yourself of the havoc they make; for you will find the ground covered over with remains of the buds they have rejected. So dainty are they in their banquet, and so well known for these destructive qualities that in some places they are called, "Pick-a-buds." The engraving I here present you with, is the

NEST OF THE BULLFINCH.

This bird often selects the fine twigs of the birch-tree, which it weaves together in a loose and irregular manner, giving you more the idea of a rough gap, which some countryman has negligently filled up in the opening of a hedge, instead of the neat-looking woven work of a practised hurdle-maker, though we have seen an instance or two of their nests built very neatly. The eggs are are of a bluish white, principally speckled and streaked with purple, generally about four in number, and very little larger than those of the linnet. The bullfinch is a beautifully-marked bird, and when caught, may, with care and attention, be taught a variety of tunes.

There is a beautiful lively bird, which may be met with at

almost any season of the year, in the neighbourhood of the sea-coast, called the

RINGED DOTTEREL:

when squatting down, its plumage is so much in keeping with the colour of the rock, and stone, and sand upon the sea-beach, that it is almost difficult to recognise it from the natural objects by which it is surrounded. Among the loose pebbles which strew the beach, or in the sand-banks of the neighbouring rivers that open out into the sea, do they lay their greenish-coloured eggs and bring forth their young. Their note is a shrill sad whistle, and like the peewit, they are seldom silent, and with every breeze that blows, and every wave that comes welling and lapping upon the shore, is their wailing sound mingled in any locality which they haunt in numbers. Its plumage is very peculiar, underneath its head and throat there is a collar of pure white, and below this a broad band encircles the whole surface of its breast and neck—this is again diversified by the under portion being of clear white, while the ends of the wings and tails are banded with black, brown, and a dullish kind of grey.

You have all heard of May-day and May-games; and although they are merry old customs which are fast fading away, yet, when I tell you that there are two maypoles still standing near the neighbourhood in which I spent my boyish days, you will like to know something about this ancient English holiday. Our ancestors used to rise early to welcome in this sweet season of the year, and with joyous shouts and merry music bring home may. They decorated the tall maypole with gaudy garlands, made of ribbons and flowers; they erected a green arbour, and selected some comely village-girl whom they crowned as Queen of May, and they danced and made merry upon the village-green to welcome in the month of flowers. Even in the olden time kings and queens, accompanied by their titled attendants, left their palaces and their castles, and rode forth into the still green country, to gather the sweet may-blossoms: and the poet Herrick in a later day tells us how, in honour of May, the streets were trimmed with trees and made green, until they looked like a park; that over the porch and door of each house there hung a fresh bough, amid which branches of the may-blossoms were neatly interwoven; and that ere the sun had well risen, many a boy and girl had returned from the woods laden with may, and brought back with them an eager appetite to enjoy their breakfast of cakes and cream. And Spenser, a much older poet, also informs us how the young folks used to flock out in the early morning to gather may-bushes and sweetbrier, with which they returned home and decorated their houses and the pillars of the church; and how they crowned the King and Queen of May with flowers, and went and came to and fro the green wood, accompanied with such sweet music that it made his very heart dance to hear it. Nor must I omit to tell you that in summer-time our ancestors strewed the floors with rushes; and that, while the branches were green and the flowers in season, they rose early in the sweet mornings of Spring and Summer, and brought home from the fields and woods, and hills and val-

leys, many a beautiful branch covered with leaves and blossoms, and many an armful of fragrant flowers, gathered while yet the dew hung fresh and heavy upon them; and with these, they decorated the interior of their buildings, making them so sweet and green that it must have been as pleasant to have sat in those old parlours and ancient halls, as in a beautiful garden summer-house, covered with woodbine and surrounded with moss-roses.

Even only last Spring while rambling among the villages in the county of Surrey, and not more than two or three hours, walk from London itself, I passed several groups of neatly-dressed boys and girls, on the morning of May-day, who were carrying large garlands composed of branches and flowers and ribbons,—reminding me pleasantly that the old May-day customs were not yet dead, and filling my mind with cheerful images of by-gone days; bringing before me the merry England which our ancient poets have enshrined in their immortal songs. And now whilst I recall the scene, it seems like gazing upon some beautiful picture, where a group of neatly-clad little maidens, with their snow-white caps decorated with ribbons, stand with their richly coloured May-garland on the fore-ground of the scene, between a green and open space surrounded on every side with tall gorse-bushes, which look as if countless thousands of golden-coloured butterflies had alighted on them, so profusely are the furze covered with deep yellow and bright blossoms, while in the back ground the dark hills lifted their broad and rounded shoulders to the sky, and in the distance arose a quiet wood as yet but thinly clad in its ancient livery of Spring-green. —It seemed also somehow more in keeping with the sober England of the present day,—a fitting amusement for those innocent children as they threaded their way over the quiet and ancient footpaths, carrying to the inhabitants of lonely and out-of-the-way houses, and still green, pastoral villages, pleasing remembrances of the old observance of May, quietly reminding

them that the month of birds and flowers had returned again, and that the sweet songsters had winged their way, far, far over the stormy sea, to warble once more in the dim shady woods, over which still arch the blue and sunny skies that make so pleasant our English Springs. For poetical as the customs of our old May-games may appear in print, they were accompanied by scenes of rude, drunken, and boisterous revelry, which would but ill accord with our better regulated notions of decorum in the present day; for we should find but little pleasure in gazing upon a noisy group of men and women, throwing themselves into all kinds of grotesque and ridiculous attitudes, as with loud whoop and holla, they hand in hand whirled round the tall may-pole to the music of some old blind fiddler, or the drone of some drowsy bagpipe. Such scenes are only pleasant when youth become the actors, when the laugh and shout rise and ring from the happy hearts of the young; and the grave and matured eye looks with a quiet smile upon their merriment—for such antics but lessen the respect which is due to the wisdom of years, when the actors themselves are men and women.

Our time was a later day than the first of May for setting out a-maying, when we frequently arose long before sunrise, and sallied out into the woods to cut down the green oaken branches, which we carried home and hung over the windows, and placed above the doorways, as our forefathers had done, until we gave to the whole town a green, wild, and woodland look. Our musical instruments were bullocks' and cows' horns, with the tips sawn off, which we blew with puffed cheeks until our lips were sore again through blowing. Wherever the largest branch of oak was hung out, there were the greatest number of boys sure to be assembled, blowing away, until they were almost black in the face, on their hideous and unmusical horns. We covered our hats with leaves of oak; and, in the centre of the broad branches which hung over the doorways, were suspended garlands of flowers. Many a bough was found

afterwards, a little distance from the wood, too large for our united strength to carry away, so left behind, like many a memento of over-reaching ambition, to tell, by its ruin, how weak was the puny arm which attempted to grasp more than it had the power to retain. This rural holiday was called "Oak-apple Day," and held on the twenty-ninth of May, in memory of the escape and restoration of Charles the Second, who, when pursued by a portion of that army which afterwards dethroned and beheaded his father Charles the First, eluded his pursuers by climbing a large oak-tree, and concealing himself amid its branches—all of which you will find recorded in the "History of England;" and you will also see that it is dangerous, even for a king, to encroach upon the liberties and rights of his subjects; and that, through over-stepping the boundaries which the laws of England had confined him within, Charles the First lost both his crown and his head, and Oliver Cromwell, a country gentleman, scarcely known before these stirring times, became at last the Protector of England, and all but entitled the king.

Another of the favourite places which we were fond of visiting in Spring, was a little cottage that stood in the centre of that old wood: you never saw such a wild romantic place in your life as this was; and I can tell you that it would have puzzled you to have found it, unless you had been acquainted with the windings and turnings which went in and out of the underwood, or had chanced to come upon the only wide path that led to it, and opened out into a number of fields, all the gates of which were locked, and where nobody went, saving when we used to wander over them, or the old man had to come across with his little cart, which he very rarely did. All round this little homestead was a land of trees; for the wood was at least four miles long, by three broad, and this wild forest-farm stood nearly in the centre of it. It seemed so strange to see a corn-field standing there, and a little green pasture, where the

grey pony and the white cow quietly grazed together; while before the door of the house stretched the beautiful garden, with its row of bee-hives; and behind it, lay the old orchard; the blossoms of the fruit trees, in Spring, looking as if they formed a portion of the wood. And all around this little enclosure, rose a high, closely-woven fence, formed of withered furze-bushes; their thick stems and prickly thorns, so matted and massed together, that even the very rabbits were compelled to burrow under-ground to get at the garden within; so impenetrable was that closely-formed barrier of furze-bushes. Then it seemed so unlike any other place in the day-time, with the bright sunlight shining there, while all around the wood looked so green and gloomy, and seemed ever to sleep amid the quiet of its undisturbed shadows. It appeared like coming upon one of those peaceful settlements, which we read of in the old American forests; so solemn, and quiet, and tranquil, and out of the world did it lay, that you would scarcely have been surprised if half-a-dozen dusky Indians had leaped over the fence out of the deep underwood, and stood before you with their war-hatchets in their hands. Then the little beds of flowers had such a strange appearance there; they looked so clean, and out-of-place, so unlike the primroses, and violets, and lilies-of-the-valley, which grew outside the barrier, and which we had to grope for in dark dingles and mossy dells, beneath trailing brambles and shady hazels, and prickly thorns, and young ferns, that were just opening their fan-like leaves and huge-armed gorse bushes, whose summits were yellow as gold; for there, was no trace there of the trees which had been cleared away; and we often fancied that it had in former days been one of those open enclosures in which the Ancient Britons dwelt, when they erected their huts in the deep solitudes of the old forests. Beautiful did that old thatched roof look, covered with every variety of creeping plant; while the smoke from the thickly ivy-covered chimney went curling upward to the

calm blue sky, that seemed to hang over, and bend there more beautifully than anywhere beside; as if it loved to look down upon such a sweet and peaceful spot. And we often asked the old man what sounds he heard at night; for to us all around looked like an enchanted land. And he told us how he used to hear in the deep midnight the fox bark, and the raven croak, and the owl hoot from its hollow home, in the decayed old oak; and how on stormy nights the tall trees rocked and roared; and that he had lived there for half a century, yet never once felt afraid. He had his dog, and his cat, and his favourite raven; a goat or two that bleated after him wherever he went: and when we saw him marching forth, with his long gun over his shoulder, we thought of Robinson Crusoe, in the desert island; for, although he was not surrounded by the sea, there ever stretched about him a great ocean of trees. All the walls of his little outhouses were built of furze-bushes, and thatched with the long reed-like grass that grew among the under wood, and which nobody, saving himself, had ever cut down. And, oh! what numbers of birds built in them, and there brought forth their young; he could not go to and fro without seeing the old ones seated upon their nests; he could have put out his hand and touched them, yet they seldom flew off, but seemed to know that with him they were safe. Then he had two great guns over the mantel-piece, and a brace of pistols in his bed-room, and a huge savage dog, whose kennel was a hogshead; and this dog went ranging round the house at night, with a long chain round his neck, and would, if any one had approached the place after dark, have flown at him, and torn him down in a moment; but, although so savage at night, yet in the day-time he would come out and wag his tail, and lick our hands, seeming to say, as well as he could, "I am quite delighted to see you!" Many a pleasant ramble had we to visit that little farm-house in the wood, where we were always welcome guests; for that old

man delighted in the society of well-behaved boys, and taught us many things, which we should never have known, about the habits of birds, and stoats, and weasels, and all those curious things which you will know more of when you have read through these volumes.

Many a journey had we in the early mornings of Spring, ere the sun had yet gilded the green summits of Somerby Wood, and while the dew lay, grey and unshaken, upon the untrodden grass, to gather worms in the moist meadows beside the Trent, with which to bait our hooks when we angled in the river. Oh, what numbers of calm deep places did we know at the corners of jetties, and in bendings between the banks, places into which the strong currents never flowed, where the wild, boiling, and ever-rippling eddies came not,—spots which lay like silver mirrors, into which the tufted reeds and tall willows were ever looking at their clear, unruffled shadows below. Happy and peaceful were the hours which we passed there, anxiously watching the float as it stood motionless in the calm water, until we saw it slightly move, just as some fish was timidly nibbling at the bait, ere we knew what addition there was in store to our

GROUP OF FISHES.

What a pleasant suspense it was; for we could not tell whether it would be a prickly perch, or a roach, or a bream; nor how large it might be, nor what it would weigh, until, becoming more emboldened, it seized firmly hold of the hook, drew the float clean under the water; and, then, if our line was strong enough, one good, sharp jerk was sure to make us secure of our prey, and in another minute it was laid upon the bright, green grass, a rich increase to our stock. True, it often grieved me to see the beautiful little white creatures, with their silver scales, gasping and tossing about upon the greensward, instead of gliding rapidly through their own bright element; but long custom had reconciled us to such sights, and many, amongst the kindest hearted of men, have been anglers. Sometimes we left our angling rods to fish for themselves, while we went to gather flowers, or sought a

SHELTER FROM THE RAIN,

like the angler we have copied from an engraving by Bewick; and which almost makes you feel as if you were getting wet through while looking at it, so heavily doos the low sky rain. Then, higher up the river, we had the osier-holt to

visit, and the osier-peelers to watch while they stripped the tall, white, tapering willow-wands; for osier-peeling was a merry time, and drew together the poor inhabitants from many a surrounding village, to this early in-gathering of Spring. Then there was a solemn and ancient spot higher up the river, where an old bridge was said to have stood ages ago, even so far back as the time of the ancient Britons, and over it Julius Cæsar and his Roman soldiers were said to have passed, though no traces of it were visible, saving a few huge stones, which were only half-bared when the water was very low. And near this spot I loved to sit and angle, for it called up the deeds of other days which had glided away for ever; and such thoughts as then passed through my mind I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with, in a little poem which I wrote on the spot, many long years ago, and entitled—

THE OLD BRIDGE.

Oft, when a boy, I wandered forth alone,
By a broad river far from any town;
And on a bank with willows overgrown,
In that still solitude would lie me down;
The tide left a long landmark brown and clear,
And, save a lonely heron, no living thing was near.

'T was a wild spot! for there, old legends say,
In ancient days a rude stone bridge had stood,
And that two thousand years had passed away
Since first its arches spanned the rapid flood;
And there, they say, the Roman troops passed o'er,
And drove the ancient Britons from the opposing shore.

And huge gigantic blocks, all quaintly wrought,
When the tide ebbs, are seen to lie around;
And battle-weapons rude, with which they fought,
In the deep river-bed are often found;
Bucklers, and bows, and blades, and dead men's bones,
Lie heaped, as in a grave, beneath those mighty stones.

And I have lain upon that ancient bank,
While deeds of other days rose on my eye:
The curlew streamed above the willows dank,
Roused by the Roman cohorts that swept by,
And gilded galleys through the white waves tore,
Their purple sails outspread, the Imperial Cæsar bore.

Then that old bridge heaved up before my sight,
The architecture rude which it displayed;
Such weapons as were used in savage fight,
And wild wolves' heads, such as in forests strayed;
While, o'er each arch, fixed with a stony frown,
Grim-bearded Druids' heads ever looked sternly down.

And o'er it, hurrying legions burst away,
Their warlike music rising on the breeze,
Till all was lost, saving the gusty sway
Of some broad banner swelling 'mid the trees,
Or sun-bright Roman eagle, half-revealed,
Passing a British town, then, by the wood concealed.

Where the wild forest stretched along the hill,
Above the bank scooped into sandy caves,
Stood the old Druids, and with voices shrill,
Sent their loud curses o'er the murmuring waves,
And as their long, white beards streamed in the blast,
On the dark oaken groves their eyes were ever cast.

In the green vale, naked and undismayed,
Ready for fight, the stalwart Britons stood,
With bow, and club, and flinty spear arrayed,
Their scythe-wheeled chariots stretched along a wood:
Before them a rude granite altar rose
Its grey and stony front facing the armèd foes.

And on that fight, looked anxious eyes of love,
Peeping in fear the forest trees between;
Wild, though they were, as untamed woodland dove,
Still there was grace and beauty in their mien;
And as the battle closed, they shrieked and sighed,
Or sent their heathen prayers across that river wide.

It might be all a dream; but oh! to me
Such fancies brought a melancholy joy;
And still that river flows on murmuringly,
Clear as it did when I sat there a boy:
And those grey stones and willows are the same
As when a dreaming boy an angler I became.

An early acquaintance with English History stored my boyish mind with endless ideas that gave me pleasure, and made me feel as if I was never alone. I could at any moment call up the great actors, who have rendered themselves so famous in the annals of our country. Caractacus, and Boadicea, had each, in my "mind's eye," an individual form. I beheld the one, stern, unbending, and undaunted, as when he stood before the Roman Emperor, a captive, and in chains. I heard the sweet voice of the other come floating upon the breeze, soft and low, yet earnest and eloquent, as when she stood up in her war-chariot, her weeping daughters, with their faces buried in their hands, seated at her feet, while she, tall and queen-like, with her long yellow hair unbound, proclaimed her wrongs to the assembled Britons, and although a woman, showed them it was nobler to die than become the slaves of their insolent invaders. I could call up the very image of the Great Alfred before me, with his grave, thoughtful, intellectual countenance, as he stood when first defeated by the misbelieving Danes, when he wandered forth homeless, crownless, and sceptreless, and was driven by hunger and danger to seek food and shelter in the swineherd's hut. I was familiar with the very armour which the Norman Conqueror wore: I had in fancy heard the tramp of his heavy cavalry as they came thundering along the opposite bank: had seen the air darkened with arrows, and beheld the blaze of many a Saxon village reddening the deepening sunset; and so I stood, peeping through the barred gates which time had closed upon the past, and looking upon the grey ruins which lay scattered and overturned in those

dim twilight walks, until armed forms again sprang up instinct with life, battlemented castles, and deep dungeons that went yawning down beneath the waters of the moat—all the rude barbarism of the past, the pomp and cruelty of chivalry, rose before me, and I felt thankful that early reading had made my memory so rich a storehouse for the past. And in these sequestered haunts I often met with the

GOLDEN PLOVER,

a beautiful, large-eyed bird, which built its nest on the ground in those wild sedgy marshes, where no doubt the same species had built long before that ancient period I have written about. Oh! what a noise would a colony of those plovers make when they were once startled! You would have thought that some great school had broken loose if you had but have heard them, such a whelping and wailing did they kick up! Then it was a great treat to see the young ones, such little downy things, running after the old plovers to search for worms; and oh, my eye! when they laid hold of one, wasn't it soon gobbled up! and though they couldn't fly, didn't they lead us a chase! for they could run like lamplighters. And they were such fellows to skulk too, and when once they had concealed themselves, there they would lie as mute as mice. Rare fun had we in chasing the golden plover.

A famous spot was that for Swallows too, about which I have told you so much in my "Autumn Book." They used to come there before I ever saw them anywhere else, and go in and out of the sluice gates, which opened into the river, as if they loved the gloomy shadow of the arch; and I remember once swimming under and seeing several of their nests there, which there was no getting at, as you may readily imagine; for where could we plant our feet, with a deep, rapid current below, and a dark shadowy arch above? dark, at least, unless when the sunshine shone through it. And it required a boy to have some courage to swim under there, for it contained such large eels; and great long-jawed pikes were ever swimming in and out: and if a little swallow happened to tumble out of its nest, it was swallowed up in an instant. I well remember that it was reckoned a daring deed to swim under that arch, and come out of the sluice gates which faced the river, for the dark water seemed ever to boil, and to look black and angry as if it would like to drown you for venturing into it; and it would but have only been poor consolation to have had one's death-chant sung by the

SWALLOWS.

But I will leave all such melancholy subjects, and tell you about an odd kind of character, who lived in a little village where one of my aunts resided, and who was known by the name of "Never-sweat-a-hair." He never allowed any thing to put him out of the way; and it used to be his boast, that he never once was in a hurry during the whole course of his life. Nothing ever seemed to annoy him. Things which other people would have regretted, and talked about for days after, appeared to have no effect upon him; and when his prime fat pig died, just as he was on the eve of killing it, instead of murmuring, he said, it was a good job it was n't one of the cows: and when he once fell down and broke his arm, and was stopped by a friend to sympathize over his misfortune, he only replied, that it would have been a much worse job if he had broken his neck. The cottage, he once lived in, chanced to take fire, and was burnt to the ground; all the neighbours, together with his wife, were busy in endeavouring to save what they could; until, at length, there was an outcry that Never-sweat-a-hair was missing. Search was made for him, and he was found seated upon a stone-heap, at some distance, busily employed with his claspknife, and eating his way through a large lump of cold bacon and bread. All he had saved, or attempted to rescue from the fire, being a basketful of provisions. And when remonstrated with, his only answer was, that good victuals once lost could never be recovered again: as for houses, and tables, and chairs, they were intended to be destroyed, for bricklayers, and cabinet-makers, and joiners must live. After the fire, he was kindly taken in by a neighbour, who cheerfully resigned his bed, and sat up the remainder of the night Next evening, about nine o'clock, Never-sweat-a-hair was missing. No one could tell where he had gone to. It was strange he did not come in, as his wife was waiting for him to accompany her to the new lodgings she had taken in the village. Ten o'clock came, and the neighbour remarked, "he is in no hurry, as

usual." And after waiting half an hour longer, the wife set out to go by herself. The friend who had been kind enough to give Never-sweat-a-hair shelter on the night that he was burnt out, sat up until after eleven before he retired; and when he got up stairs he was never more surprised than to find Never-sweat-a-hair in bed, and comfortably asleep. After arousing him, and telling him how long his wife had been waiting, he arose reluctantly, and having indulged in three or four gapes and half a dozen stretches, as if occupying his bed was of no more consequence than having sat down in one of his chairs, he said, "Well then I must be moving if that 's it. I hope you 're not in a hurry. I never am. I must sleep somewhere; and so long as there 's no hurry, it does n't matter to me where it is." It used to be his boast, that he had escaped more accidents through never having been in a hurry, than twenty people ever had through running away and endeavouring to avoid them. "I remember a bull," said he, "that tossed half a dozen people who scampered off; but I was in no hurry for my turn, so took my station behind a gas-post; and when he came full butt at me, he struck the gas-post instead of me, knocking himself down with the force of the blow. He was in no hurry to get up again, and I thought it very wise of him, as I walked away." One day, the front of an old house chanced to fall in while he was passing, and there was a man before him who ran to get out of the way, and was knocked down by a beam falling; while Never-sweat-a-hair stood beside the ruins uninjured, and said, "If he had n't been in a hurry he would have escaped as well as I did." He chanced once to be crossing the river in the ferry-boat, which was very old, when a restive young horse, being also a passenger, happened to strike its hoof through the bottom of the boat, which, through decay, began to fill instantly. The ferryman leaped overboard, and had a very narrow escape of his life. Never-sweat-a-hair stood up to his knees in water, and saw it gradually increase, inch by inch, as it

was driven by the current on the shore, which when it touched it filled and went down. He turned half round, and saw the ferryman pulling himself out of the river, at some distance higher up, by the willows, and said, "If he had but waited like me he would have saved himself that ducking." He used to say, that Danger always ran straight forward, and that those who were before it only gave it encouragement to follow. That people who walk in the middle of the road on a windy day, to avoid a falling chimney-pot, choose the very spot where it is likeliest to fall, if it is a narrow street. "I keep close to the wall, and am never in a hurry, and it is sure enough to keep clear off my head. There never was a great discovery," he said, "made through any one being in a hurry, in the world. They were all easy, patient men," he contended, "and he would bet a bunch of turnips to a leg of mutton, providing both parties, if they lost, should club the articles together, and have a dinner after, that, if it could be proved, these great men never sweat a hair in their lives." He used to argue that what was a misfortune to one was a blessing to another; and that once he was on board of a steamboat which chanced to run aground, and while others were deploring the delay, he was thankful for it, for it just allowed him time to go home, without being hurried, to fetch something he had left behind. He always carried an umbrella with him in fair weather, for he said he could not bear to be hurried in case it rained. If he went into a house, and people made an excuse for not offering him a cup of tea, because the kettle had not yet boiled, of course, he was never in a hurry, and could always wait. Excuses were of no avail where he came. He knew by heart every verse of the "Proverbs," where it says, "there is a time for every thing." He called railways the road to ruin; as he declared nothing could succeed that ever went so rapid; and he believed that the disease in potatoes arose from guano; for how can we expect any thing good he said, that is grown so quick. He used to keep a tor-

toise, for he considered it one of the wisest animals in creation. "It did every thing so leisurely" he said, "and was a month in making up its mind before it moved at all." He looked upon the snail also as displaying great wisdom, and said that if every body who paid a visit to their relations had the same forethought, and carried their house with them, they would generally meet with a much warmer reception. He was never known to buy but one plant in his life, and that was an American Aloe, because he had heard it was a hundred years before it flowered; and said that although he should 'nt live to see it, he knew it would be very handsome when it blowed, and there was no hurry. He was a great admirer of big trees, and said, they took their time over what they did. And on his mantelpiece he had a large collection of hard hollow stones: and he delighted in talking about the hundreds of years it had taken the water, as it fell drop by drop, to wear away and form one of those cavities. He valued his watch all the more because it always went too slow, for he said he felt doubly impressed how rapid was the flight of Time; and how useless it was to attempt to overtake him. Man, he argued, was originally intended to go slowly; and, as a proof of it, instanced how long a child was learning to walk by itself, compared with other objects, many of whom could run when they were only a few days old.

He called a backward season a fine slow Spring, and said that things would be all the better for it. When he heard that a raven lived a hundred years, he bought one immediately; and he said that was a fact worth proving; he was in no hurry, but he should see. He loved to watch a heavily-laden stage wagon creeping slowly along with its four horses, and always rode in them in preference to stage coaches, because, he said they were slow and sure. To show the many advantages which a man gained through not being in a hurry, he used to tell an anecdote of a farmer who, while sipping his pea-soup, took a five-pound note out of his pocket-book to get it changed, so that he might

not lose a moment, the instant he had swallowed his dinner, in starting off for home. The note fell into the soup, and as he snatched it up to shake off what had adhered to it under the table, the dog which was lying at his feet, thinking that its master was going to give it a taste of his dinner, as usual, made a snatch at the note, which, having been steeped in the soup, could in no wise be disagreeable, and swallowed it in an instant. In vain did the farmer lift up the dog by the tail, as if to make him disgorge it: it was gone, and there was an end of it. Now, argued Never-sweat-a-hair, such a loss could never have happened to a man unless he had been in a hurry. I should never have thought about changing till I 'd finished my dinner In the second place, had such a misfortune befallen me, I should have wiped the note clean first. Thirdly, I should have got up and sat by the fire until it had dried. And, fourthly, I should never have made a practice of feeding the dog until I had finished my own dinner. And so he would go on, endeavouring to prove that the farmer only lost his note through being in a hurry. He once went ten miles to see a castle which had outstood a twelvemonth's siege; and often said he should like to have known that governor, for he was sure he was a man who did nothing in a hurry. He often said that he should like to live in one of the pyramids of Egypt, for that would be a house where a man would not have much trouble with repairs. He selected his wife, he said, because she employed five minutes in scraping a thin cheese-crust the first time he saw her; and he felt confident that she would never be one to do any thing in a hurry. The sunshiny side of the way, he said, was only made for men like himself, who enjoyed it; and that only people with contented hearts were to be found there. On the shady side, he said, every body seems in a bustle; but I like to be among people who never sweat a hair. He was, of course, a great admirer of cattle shows; for he used to argue, that no creature could ever get fat unless it

was of a happy disposition. They cannot be in a hurry if they would, he used to say. And he thought that it was a good slow progress in testing the strength of leather, to see how much a hide would stand distending, without giving way, while the animal was alive; and he was delighted with the pig that made three attempts to open its eyes, and could not; and had he sat as judge, he declared that he should have awarded to its owner a prize. He often told the well-known story of the boy, who, when asked by the sportsman if he had seen a hare run that way, answered, "A hare, sir?" "Yes, yes," exclaimed the impatient sportsman, "a hare." "Had it long ears, sir?" inquired the boy. "Yes, yes, long ears," was the hurried answer. "And a short tail, sir?" the boy further asked. "And a short tail," answered the man, losing both his temper and the hare through the delay. "And when it ran did it go lobberty lob, lobberty lob?" proceeded the boy, with the coolest indifference. "Yes, yes; that 's it," replied the man, more snappishly than ever. "Which way did it run?" "I do n't know," answered the lad, without ever changing his countenance, "for I have not seen it." Now, said he, that was a sensible lad: he examined every part of the question carefully, and took time to consider, for he was in no hurry; and, depend upon it, if he were to live until he was ninety he would never sweat a hair. He had a volume full of scraps, containing anecdotes of persons who had narrow escapes through being too late. And he often talked about the man, who, when told by his doctor that smoking was a slow poison, said, that was why he still continued it, for he had already been a smoker above fifty years. What a contrast was there between Never-sweat-a-hair and Flying Jemmy, as we used to call a tall thin man, who was "all legs and wings," and whom, to look at, you would have thought a strong gust of wind would blow round the corner! What jokes used to pass between these two whenever they met! "Well, Tortoise," the Shadow used to exclaim, "have n't you walked yourself to

sleep yet?" "You'll be so thin soon," answered Never-sweat, "that it'll take two men to see you; and you were in such a hurry yesterday that your shadow had fairly to run to keep up to you. You go so quick," continued the easy one, "that even your thoughts cannot keep up with you; and you outstrip them so far, that you are often compelled to return home two or three times to inquire again what business you were going about." "And you are so long making up your mind about a thing," answered Flying Jemmy, "that by the time you have made it up, it is too late. As when you were about purchasing Paul Proctor's cow, and were so long hesitating, that before you had completed the bargain the poor thing died." "Hey, hey," Never-sweat would reply, "and through not being in a hurry I saved my ten pounds." The Flyer never looked before him in dirty weather, and went through all kinds of puddles. Never-sweat seldom took a step without first examining the ground he trod upon. His garden was unlike any other person's; for when their things were going out of season, his were coming in: and this he considered another great advantage acquired through not being in a hurry. He never was on a jury but once, and then he brought his nightcap; for although the rest were unanimous in returning a verdict of "guilty" ere the trial was half ended, as the thief had been captured within a few yards of the spot where the robbery was committed, and the stolen property found upon his person, yet Never-sweat was not to be hurried: he would hear all that could be said on the subject, nor could he be persuaded to give his decision at all until after a long sleep; and when he awoke he apologized for sleeping, and said he hoped he had not hurried them. They used to tell a tale about a poor man who once fell into a deep pond, where he stuck up to the middle in mud, and up to the chin in water; and seeing Never-sweat-a-hair crawling by, the poor fellow called to him for assistance. Never-sweat sat down upon the bank,

and very leisurely began to unlace his boots; and when the poor man begged of him to make haste, as he felt himself sinking deeper, Never-sweat answered, "Would you have me break a new boot-lace? Stop a bit, till I 've undone the knot: do n't be in a hurry." The man extricated himself as well as he could, and when he got out shoved Never-sweat in, exclaiming, "Although they say you never sweat a hair in your life, I wo'n't leave 'em to say you never wet a hair." This ducking did Never-sweat a deal of good; and it was noticed that he quickened his pace from that day, and began to think there were occasions sometimes when a person ought to be in a hurry. When any body asked Never-sweat to do a thing he did not like, he used to say it was "as bad as leaving off work, to go and saw deals;" meaning it was worse than what he was then doing, for sawing deals is no joke I can tell you; though all my knowledge about sawing is see-saw, a game we often played near a saw pit which was dug on the common, and for which game we had only to borrow a plank, and place it across the rounded stem of one of the trees, plenty of which lay about, and commence the amusement called

SEE-SAW.

Rare fun was it to keep riding up-and-down on that large, long plank, on which two of us were seated, one at each end; and very often, when our wooden horse was not properly balanced, down it would slip, at the heaviest end, leaving the boy opposite perched up a good height in the air, until a more equal adjustment of "pudding," as we called it, was made; and when the plank was once more properly parted, away we went, as regularly as the upper beam which you see on board a steamer, in the engine-room. And beside being excellent amusement, it was also capital exercise, and very healthy too—not that we were ever much troubled with ill-health, saving when we caught a cold now and then, through sitting in some draught while in a violent perspiration, which is about one of the worst things any boy can ever do to injure a good constitution.

Oh, what old-fashioned sports I used to see in the country at Whitsuntide, at the wakes, and village feasts. Sometimes a long pole was erected, at the top of which was placed a new hat, and he who could climb up, and fetch it down, obtained the prize. Then the pole was so smooth, and made so slippery with soft soap and grease, that it was impossible to keep hold of it with the hands, or climb many yards without sliding down again; and sometimes two and three were clambering up at a time, and when he who was uppermost chanced to slip, down he came, and down came those who were beneath him; and rare fun it was to see them all lay, laughing and scrambling upon the ground. Then some took up their pockets full of sand, and dry dirt, and saw-dust, so as to make the pole rough, and rub off the grease, that they might retain a firmer hold; and often, after a dozen had tried without succeeding, up would go some little fellow, after all the slippery substance had been rubbed off, fresh as a lark, and come sliding down triumphantly with the prize on his head. Then there were races with men who trundled wheelbarrows before them blindfolded, and jumped in sacks which were fastened tightly about their necks, and who,

when they tumbled down, were unable to get up again. It was so laughable to see half-a-dozen sacks with a man's head, and nothing more, peeping out of each; and when one happened to stumble against the other, down they both came, and could neither get up nor out until they were released; and sometimes they were left there a good while to kick, and holla, and storm, while the bystanders only looked on and laughed, and refused to release them until they grew more civil. Then the men who were blindfolded, with the wheelbarrows, run foul of each other, and tumbled into hedges and ditches, and went every way but the one which led to the winning-place; for some called out, "more to the right," others, "more to the left," one, "this side," and another, "that side," until souse one of them would come into a stagnant ditch, or head over heels in a horse-pond, much to the annoyance of themselves, and greatly to the amusement of the lookers-on. Then there was a pig to be caught, with his tail greased, on the wide, open common; and one was generally selected that was as thin as a half-penny herring, and could run like a greyhound, while his long tail was smooth and slippery as glass; and the moment he was laid hold of, his greasy tail slipped out of the hand, and away he went with a grunt and a squeal, and was half way over the common before the man who had tumbled down was enabled to get up again; for sometimes the pig would head the chase for a full hour without being caught, very often escaping all his pursuers, and reaching home again; and when this was the case they had only their labour for their reward. But the most laughable part of all these Whitsuntide games, was, when they ate hot hasty pudding for a wager—the victor being he who first emptied his dish. Oh, you should have seen them when they commenced, for it was turned out of the pan into the basons boiling hot! How one blowed, and another grinned, and a third kept taking a little bit from round the edges, while a fourth swallowed so hot a mouthful that it fetched the tears into his eyes, when instead of

being pitied for the pain he endured, he was laughed at for his folly: and, perhaps, some little fellow who had got into a corner, and to all appearance kept only licking his spoon, had quietly worked his way to the bottom ere the others were aware, by skimming off the top carefully, and scarcely ever losing a moment without swallowing a portion; and so, while the other competitors were blowing, and stirring, and scarcely making any progress, he was quietly finishing his mess, and to the astonishment of all turned up his empty basin, and won the prize. Then came the donkey-race—oh, such racing! one would n't start at all, in spite of all the pushing and shoving behind; another would set off quite a contrary way to that he was wished to go: a third, would very leisurely down with his head and up with his heels, and lay his rider sprawling upon the earth a yard or two off; while a fourth, perhaps, finding that there was no other means of getting rid of his jockey, would treat him to a roll upon the road; and it would sometimes so happen that the one which did little more than the whole length at a full trot would come in and win the race, which was generally for a new saddle and bridle. Rude as these sports were, they were such as our forefathers had loved to look upon; and as the betting rarely went beyond a quart or two of ale, or a glass of grog, such wagers could do but little injury to any one. If they were vices, they belonged to the most innocent class, and were much more harmless than those gentlemanly ones of carding, dicing, and betting enormous sums at fashionable race-courses, which I hope none of you will ever be guilty of doing.

It is not every boy who knows what a downright common village school is, such a one as I have before me at this moment, standing as it does at the end of a large straggling hamlet, and in the neighbourhood of five or six smaller villages, the remotest of which do not lay more than three or four miles from the centre one in which the school is stationed. And from all these surrounding hamlets, and solitary farm-

houses, and straggling cottages, do the boys come; some from over the hills, and some through the woods, and others across the far-off green and pleasant fields, bringing their dinners with them in little baskets, and dropping into the school, one after another, at all kinds of odd and irregular hours; for how is it possible to resist the many pleasing temptations they meet with by the way? In they come in smock-frocks, and heavy-nailed ankle-boots, with hats and caps crushed into all manner of forms through climbing up trees, and poking into hedges; while their chubby cheeks are either red as an apple-blossom, or, through exposure to the sun, almost the colour of a ripe hazel-nut. Clever lads are they all at finding out a bird's nest, hunting a water-rat, or a water-hen, chasing a stoat or a weasel, running young hares or rabbits almost off their legs; but as to learning any thing beside, you never saw such dunces as many of them are. It took them days and days of practice to make straight strokes, and pothooks, and round O's, for their round O's had often three corners, sometimes more; their straight strokes were not unlike a dog's hinder leg; and as for their hooks they went up and down, a little to the right and a little to the left, and were so entangled and twisted, and ran one into the other, that, for the life of you, you could not tell where they begun nor where they ended. In their sums, they made two and two five, they carried one to four, and made seven of it easily; took six from nine and left any thing behind you please from thirteen to thirty; carried one to eight and made fifteen of it like "winking;" made three-and-sixpence out of sixty pence; and in casting up twelve pounds of butter, at a shilling and a halfpenny a pound, they were pretty sure to come near double the same number of shillings, either under or over. X and Z they made vowels of, and turned E and O into consonants; they found a plural in a single pen, but a score was with them singular. They pronounced antique, "antikew;" and fatigue, "fatigew;" and no, "Noah:" spelt command, "kumhand;"

and in their knowledge of geography made Grand Cairo in Cornwall; and believed America to be situated somewhere in Argyleshire; Ireland and the East Indies they said joined each other; and Africa was with them a market-town, where they sold large ostriches' eggs. They tore up their books to make paper boats of, and swam them as they went home in the streams they passed. They held their pens as a housemaid does a poker; and when they had blotted their copybooks all over, so as to leave no space to write, they finished by blacking each other's faces with the remainder of the ink. They broke up their slates to play at "pitch and toss" with; and after the schoolmaster had whacked them, till his arm fairly ached again, they sat down upon the forms as if nothing at all had happened and said they "didn't care." If, to punish them, he withheld their dinners until they went home, by keeping back the basket in which their provisions were stored, and they could by any chance get outside the door, they rioted to excess upon a raw turnip, and banqueted like an emperor on beetroot, and fairly licked their lips over a green cabbage. If they could but get hold of the cane, with which they had been beaten, they cut it up into small pieces to smoke; they got astride the forms when their master's back was turned, made them rear up, and played at horses; they made the most awful noises, then pretended to look innocently round as if they wondered who had done it. They stowed away young birds in their hats, and, instead of attending to their lessons, imitated the chirping of the birds; and if an opportunity presented itself, without being discovered, they put on the clock that they might leave all the earlier, and told all kinds of stories about their parents wanting them to go errands, that they might get out of school the sooner. They never cared to mount a donkey unless he was a well-known kicker; would not tell their name for a dike, unless there was a chance of some half-dozen of them getting up to their middle in leaping it, and were always practising at

those fences which were the most renowned for grazing shins. There was scarcely a tree, however difficult it might be, but what they could clamber up; no garden-hedge so thick but what they contrived to get through it; nor no pinfold in the neighbourhood but what they could get the stray shaggy pony out of, if they once set about it. They could run like greyhounds, throw a stone to within an inch or two of the object they aimed at, and when they had done wrong hide themselves in such holes and corners as you would only think a rat would ever dream of getting into.

Sometimes they managed to arrive at school just in time to see the better behaved scholars leaving, and now and then they never got there at all. Occasionally, too, they had to wait outside an hour or more before they could get in, as the master had gone to measure some land for a farmer, or to see how many feet of timber there were in a tree which had just been felled. For his ideas of education extended no further than in the belief that to read a chapter in the testament without making above a dozen mistakes; to write a good, staring, round hand, which all who run might read; and to cast up and divide an account, to within a shilling or two of the true amount, was to turn out a pretty decent sort of a scholar. And it was his boast that many a boy could, by careful spelling, make out the farmer's name, which was painted on the front of the wagon, who, but for him, would never have known "a B from a bull's foot." When he could not get them to learn as he wished, he invariably thrashed them: if this did not succeed, he starved them: when this would not answer, he kept them so late that it was often dark by the time they reached home. As to teaching them, he never thought of that, there were the books, and copies and slates, and there was he, ready to thrash, starve, and keep them, if they would not say their lessons, and write their copies. He had his little garden to attend to, and farmers This-that-and-the-other to chat with whenever they rode past;

and if, when he came in again, he found the boys fighting hand over head, why he also fought too, and, as he said, "contrived to let them see who was master." To induce them to become good boys, he promised that they should weed his garden, or gather a few barrow-loads of manure on the roads, for his little paddock; and it was wonderful how quiet they would remain for five minutes or so, whenever he offered them such pleasant promises. Sometimes he went out with them to play at Hounds and Hare, he himself taking the part of the hare; and after him they went, over hedge and ditch, for he was all legs and wings, and they pulled at his coat-laps, got him down and pretended to worry him, forgiving him all the thrashings he had given them, and never caring or bestowing a thought about those they were likely enough to receive the very next day. He argued, that beating them well caused them to grow, and that keeping back their dinners would prepare them for being good farmers, and enable them better to endure the many hours which they would have to labour in the fields without food. He made them dibble and set his potatoes, as he said, to instruct them in agriculture; cut grass by the road-side for his pony, so that they might have an idea of doing something "when they went out to place;" and gather acorns for his hogs in autumn, to instruct them a little in getting in harvest. He sent them on errands five or six miles off, to the market-town, and although they sometimes lost the money, or brought soap for sugar, tin-tacks for tea, and candles instead of coffee, he only beat them, and sent them back again the next day; for he argued, that a long walk and a good whacking were two of the finest things in the world to improve the memory.

He had only been elected schoolmaster, by the neighbouring farmers, because he excelled all the other candidates in his answers about how many loads of manure there would be in a dunghill of such a size, and how many square yards in a field of given dimensions. He read a paragraph from the newspa-

per which laid upon the table, did a sum in subtraction, which one of the farmers set him, wrote his name in small hand, and then in large, and was elected by a majority of three. Such was the schoolmaster, and such were his pupils; nor was there one amongst them all who had a greater objection to a long hard word than himself. Still he was at the bottom a good-hearted man, he knew that the race he had to deal with would be sent out to sow and plough, and tend cattle, and not one out of ten would ever, perhaps, take up any thing but a song, to get off, after they left school, or write on a barn-door, with chalk, how much their wages came to in a month, at ten pounds a year. Nor is my picture at all overdrawn, for sorry I am to say, that many such schoolmasters and scholars, are yet to be found in those out of-the-way and obscure villages, which are scattered up and down England, even in the present day. Nor is there, perhaps, much exaggeration in the description, which some of you may have heard, of a village schoolmistress and her scholars, who when they could not very clearly remember even their letters, some such dialogue as the following took place :—Schoolmistress: "What letter's that, Billy?" Billy: "Do n't know." "What 's that farmer Jobson feeds his horses with, Billy? "Straw," answers Billy at a venture, "No, hay," replies his enlightened instructress. "Remember it 's hay, Billy," "Now what letter 's that, Billy?" inquires she, proceeding again. "Don't know," answers the chubby-faced pupil, counting the marbles in his pocket, and looking upon the ground. "What 's that which flies about in the garden with a sting in its tail, Billy?" "A wasp," answers Billy, his thoughts wandering to the sunny bank, and the hole at which he has watched them go in and out so often. "No, Billy; a bee, Billy," replies the dame, exulting again in her superior knowledge. "Remember a bee, Billy; and B E spells bee; and a bee makes honey, Billy; and h-u-n-n-double-e spells honey, Billy. Now, Billy, what 's the next letter? I know you know that." "Crooked S,"

answers Billy at a venture. "No it is n't," answers she; "try again." "Then it 's round O" replies he, quite positive this time. "No it 's not: what do I do with my eyes, Billy?" "Squint," says the young vagabond, telling the truth at last, and grinning from ear to ear. "Squint, do I? you young dog!" she answers, fetching him a bat on the head with the book, and scattering all the loose leaves upon the floor. "It 's C, you ignorant little jackass you, C-E; and I 'll make you see before I 've done with you, that I will, for saying I squint." And up she jumps and chases Billy, with the book-cover in her hand, round the room, and over the forms, and in and out between the scholars, until at last she probably tumbles all her length upon the floor; while her hopeful pupil runs, screaming and laughing, out of the door, followed by the whole string of scholars; and such is the end of Billy's lesson for that day. And all such pupils would do to improve themselves after they left school would be, to cut out some queer hieroglyphics, which they called the initials of their names, either upon a gate-post, or the church-spout; while their reading would be confined to spelling out the names on the shop-signs; and by a great effort they would perhaps be enabled to count twenty backwards without making a mistake. What think you to such a school as this, my boys?

I will now endeavour to describe to you the life which a country-boy leads, whose parents are very poor. He is scarcely out of his mother's arms above a few years, before he has to nurse some great fat baby of a brother or sister, half as big as himself, while his father and mother go out to work in the fields; and this great chubby-cheeked "babby" he carries with him into the lanes, and fields, and on the commons, and he sets it down anywhere, while he hunts in the hedges for nests; and sometimes the little thing will, when it grows big enough to crawl, as if anxious to gather all the flowers at once, throw itself down, spread out its little legs and arms to their fullest extent, and crow again with delight, while its innocent

face is buried amongst the flowers, delighted to think that they are all his own, if it chooses to gather them. When he grows up, he goes to gather fuel in the woods or lanes; tents the cows for somebody, and has perhaps a shilling a week for it. If he does this, his whole day is spent in the pleasant green lanes,—for all he has to do is to see that they do not get into the fields, or run away, or trespass anywhere, and get into the pinfold. How he amuses himself I can hardly tell you. Sometimes he runs after the birds, tries to make traps to catch them, chases bees and butterflies, plaits rushes together and makes himself a dunce's cap, jumps a bit, runs a bit, whistles a bit, has a nap if he likes, opens the gate for some horseman who may happen to pass, and fairly crows again if the traveller should by chance throw him a halfpenny; and depend upon it, his thoughts are fully occupied for all the remainder of that day, by thinking of what he shall buy with it; but the first and last thought is the little confectioner's shop, and there it goes. The very first thing he purchases, when he is rich enough, is a knife, and he spends hours in sharpening it on a stone; then he cuts gate-posts, and sticks, and branches of may-blossoms off with it; and it is never out of his hand for the first week or two, only when he is asleep. If he can only get out "to place," he is happy; for he has often heard what lumps of fat bacon, and great hunches of brown bread, and huge porringers of new milk, and mugs of home-brewed beer, boys get who live in the large farmhouses; and he longs for the time when he shall get his victuals for his labour, and his parents will only have to find him his clothes. That time at length comes, and oh! isn't he busy then! he has the pigs and the poultry to feed, and he goes out into the fields in the early part of Spring with a great fork over his shoulder, and knocks the manure about, to get a good appetite for his dinner. And he has to run all the errands,—to the mill about the corn, and to the blacksmith with something he can hardly carry to mend; but above all,

WATERING THE CATTLE

is what delights him most, because he can ride both there and back to the clear bright "beck;" for such is the name given to a sheet of water that runs across a road in the country, though I cannot tell you why it is so called. Oh, you should but see him sitting astride of one of the broad-backed horses, and driving the cattle before him! he is some proud I can tell you; and when he has had a little more practice, he is intrusted with the horse all the way to the mill, to bring home a sack of flour on its back. Then if the land is heavy, he drives the horses for the ploughman, carries a long whip over his shoulder, and cries "gee-hooe-gee" like a man. He now wears heavy ankle-boots, and a blue or white smock-frock, a round cart-hat, and lifts up his smock-frock to put his knife into his waistcoat-pocket just like the head-man, John; and thinks that the day will perhaps come when he shall have a watch of his own, like him; then wo'n't he pull it out about every five minutes or so to see what o'clock it is? He can now weed, and

plant potatoes, and bush-harrow, that is, drive the horse up and down the field, that drags an old gate behind it filled with thorns, to raise and lighten the grass, and level and break up the mould. But, oh! I cannot tell you one-half of the things he does; though I must not forget one great event in his life, and that is when he is first trusted with a gun, and allowed to shoot at the sparrows and rooks in the corn-field. If he cannot hit them, he can the gate somewhere; and perhaps after a many tries he happens to send one single small shot into his hat: ah! you should but see him show his companions the hole;—but then the old gun is pretty sure to send its shot somewhere, for when it comes out of the worn-out old barrel, it spreads about nearly the space of half-a-dozen yards. When he gets money enough, he gives five shillings for a "real" beaver hat, to wear on a Sunday; and to show you that it really is beaver, he brushes the nap up the wrong way, so that every body may see what a lot of beaver there is on it. The next thing he purchases is a shaggy plush waistcoat, either a red or yellow one, covered with black spots: if yellow, he believes it to be made of a leopard's skin. He now carries a stick, and takes a delight in standing and talking to men, especially if any body of consequence happens to be passing; and if he sees any youngsters in the fields trespassing who are a year or so his juniors, he calls out, "Will you boys get off there?" and if they happen to run away directly, he thinks himself somebody at once. He makes friends with the old shepherd-dog, and bribes it with lumps of bacon and pieces of bread to follow him; and if it only steps a yard or two aside, and any body is by, he calls out, "Come here, sirrah," to let them see that he has something to do with it,—for he wishes people to think that he is a man all but "a little bit." Is n't he proud if any great farmer passes him and says, "How are you, Jack?" or "Do you think we shall have any wet?" Oh, does n't he look up, and, if he chances to say, "I think, Mr. Jobbins, we shall

have a little rain," he wishes heartily that it may rain, so as to give the farmer a high opinion of his "weather-wisdom."

And now I think I have given you an insight into all his little vanities, for when he begins to talk to Betty I have done with him; and if he buys her a ribbon when he goes to market, why, depend upon it he means "sweet-hearting;" and then let any lad call him a boy after that if he dare, for he would turn round and say, "Where do you find your men?" Remember, I have given him no schooling; and there are many like him who, saving a few hours on the sabbath, never had time to go to school, nor ever knew any thing about the world, beyond the neighbouring market-town, which they visit once or twice a year, perhaps, and the village in which they were born. Gray, in his beautiful "Elegy," which I hope all of you have read, has summed up such a life in a few lines, where he says,

> "Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
> Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
> How jocund did they drive their team afield;
> How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!
>
> "Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
> Their homely joys, and destiny obscure!
> Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
> The short and simple annals of the poor."

The world may never even hear of their names; yet they have done their day's work, their duty to their fellow-men: and without such as these, who were once poor country-boys, our fields would remain uncultivated, and our harvest unreaped. So here I end with an old English sentiment, often the motto on a village alehouse sign, and say, "God speed the Plough."

There was a curious character who used to wander about amongst the villages, and whom I could never look upon, when a boy, without a mingled feeling of wonder and awe, and that was

the country Rat-catcher. He was a thin man, with a face the colour of a walnut, with sharp, dark little eyes that were deeply set in his head, and a long chin that seemed to project out as far as his nose, while his forehead went sloping back, and his cheeks were nearly covered with short brown hair; and I never looked at him without being struck by the resemblance he bore to an old rat. He looked like a rat, he smelt like a rat, and when he was in a hurry he went jumping on like an old rat that had got two stiff legs. From head to heel he was all over rats: he wore a great, long, cotton-velvet coat, full of strange pockets from top to bottom, every one of which buttoned over; and this coat was fairly alive with rats. Put his hand wherever he would, inside or out, into any one of those mysterious pockets, and out came a great long-tailed, black-eyed rat. He wore a belt over his shoulder, that went under the opposite arm, and nearly reached down to his knee, and this was covered all over with figures of gilded rats. His glazed hat was also surrounded with them; his purse and tobacco-pouch were made of the dried skins of rats; there was one carved on the lid of his snuff-box, and even his tobacco-stopper was a rat's foot mounted with silver. He pulled them out of his pockets, and allowed them to run about him, up his arms, and on his shoulders, and round his neck, and in and out of his great velvet coat they went squeaking; and out of his pockets they sometimes sat, peeping like swallows from the holes in their nests. He had names for them all—such funny names: "Short-tail," and "Round-ears," and "Black-nose," and "Bob-with-his-eye-out," and "Nock-the-nailer," and "Tommy Licktrencher," and "Dicky-in-the-dumps," and "Jacky-my-love;" and they all seemed to know their names: and when he called them, Short-tail, who had lost two or three inches of his hinder appendage, would poke out his head; and the one whose ears he had cut would make his appearance; then out would come the next, whose nose looked as if it had been blacked with ink; he was

followed by old Bob, who had only got one eye, and who always looked as if he were asleep; then came Nock-the-nailer, so called because he was always knocking about in the pocket, and never at rest; he was put away and succeeded by Tommy Licktrencher, who was ever hungry; then came Dicky-in-the-dumps, a sulky dog, whose tail he was compelled to pull to make him move at all; then Jacky-my-love, the greatest favourite in the lot, who was ever trying to get at the old man's long chin, as he said to kiss him, though we often thought to ourselves that he had a most villanous look, and contemplated giving him a good bite. And sometimes the old rat-catcher would get into the large tap-room of the village public-house, and by clambering up the horseblock, and looking in at the window, we could see him turn out his whole family of rats at once, and hold them to the very noses of his rough wire-haired terriers, who never attempted to touch them, although they would have nipped up and worried any strange rat that they had chanced to come near, in the twinkling of an eye. Then he had ferrets, too, such long-bodied, white-haired, strange-looking animals, with eyes as red as rubies; and although they would have laid hold of your finger, and drawn blood in a moment, yet they allowed him to handle them, and play with them; for he had tamed them to such a degree that with him they seemed playful as kittens: and with his ferrets and terriers he went about from farmhouse to farmhouse, earning his livelihood by the destruction of rats. And no sooner did he put one of these ferrets into a corn-rick, or a hole in the barn, than out the rats would come, rushing one after the other, and there stood the terriers ready to worry them in an instant; and in this manner two or three score were destroyed in the space of an hour or two. Mr. Jesse, in his "Gleanings," a work full of interesting anecdotes relating to the habits of animals, speaking of the destructive nature of the rat, says, that when a proposition was made for removing a horse slaughter-house to a greater distance

from Paris, the great objection made to such a removal was a fear of the ravages they would make in the neighbourhood, when they had no longer the carcasses of the slaughtered horses to feed upon; as many as thirty horses, or more, were sometimes slaughtered in a day, and nothing but their bare bones found next morning, all picked clean by the rats. In one of these slaughter-houses, which was enclosed by solid walls, the carcasses of two or three horses were placed, and in the night the workmen blocked up all the holes through which the rats went in and out as they pleased; when this was done, the workmen went inside, with lighted torches and heavy sticks, and in one night killed 2,650 rats: in four such hunts the numbers destroyed were above 9,000. They made themselves burrows in the surrounding neighbourhood like rabbits, and to such an extent were these excavations carried, that the earth sometimes fell in, and revealed the immense subterraneous works which they had made. They also multiplied so rapidly that there was not room for them to lodge in the slaughter-houses, and paths could be distinctly traced in the fields over which they came to feed in the night, and returned in the morning.

There is scarcely a village in England without a little shop in it, where you see over the doorway, in strange-looking letters, "Licensed Dealer in Tea, Coffee, Tobacco and Snuff, Pepper and Vinegar," where they keep every thing well-seasoned, and very little that is fresh. You cannot mistake it, for there are generally a lot of little children looking in, licking their lips, and seeming to envy the very sunshine which is melting the lollipops in the glass jars; wishing that they were small as flies to hop about and eat up the dirty handful of sugar that is thrown in one corner of the window; and fairly longing to have a suck of the two or three wizened oranges, which have lain undisturbed for weeks on their little bed of comfortable dust in the corner. There is generally a hair broom, a mop, and a besom at the

door, and an empty tea-chest which the carrier brought, and which, when full, contained a dozen sixpenny fire-shovels, a dozen pieces of hearthstone, ditto of Bath bricks, and the same number of lumps of pipeclay, with divers and sundry packages of red ochre. They never lay in a stock of more than a pound of tea at a time, which the carrier brings to them in his coat-pocket; and were any little girl to come for a whole ounce, they would send her back again to see if it was not a mistake, so accustomed are they to serve out only half and quarter of ounces. They make halfpennyworths of sugar, and seldom give a child a pennyworth of treacle in a teacup, without a caution not to put his finger in and lick it as he goes home; for if he does, it will be short weight when he gets there. They are never without gingerbread cakes, plum buns, and biscuits; but as they are all mixed together in one drawer, it frequently takes some time to find such as are wanted, and when found, scarcely any thing less than a good heavy hammer will break them; nor is there the remotest chance of eating them at all, until they have had a good soaking in a basin of water. The top row of the window is generally dedicated to a few whipping and pegging tops in a net; half-a-dozen shuttlecocks stuck in one another; a couple of halfpenny battledores to match; a spotted harlequin suspended by the neck, who kicks up his legs and arms beautifully when the string behind is pulled; a wax-doll, whose nose and lips the sun has melted away; a wooden dog that used to squeak when it was moved, before it fell down and got broken; two or three soldiers on horseback lying higgledy-piggledy together, some of the men without heads, and some of the horses without legs; and two or three halfpenny kites, with a beautiful cross in the middle, marked with red ochre; with one or two other articles, such as a sixpenny fiddle without strings, the bow of which has long since been lost—and these make up what the village shopkeeper calls his toy department. The second row is dedicated to a very small show of crockeryware: a

few little packages which are either groats, oatmeal, or lucifer matches, you cannot tell which, unless you go close and read the labels; beside these, stand two or three bottles of patent medicines, those intended for the use of the villagers being the smallest, those for the cows and horses a little larger. Next stand a couple of pens, a box full of wafers, and a little bottle which once contained ink. These are matched by half-a-dozen pipes, very tastefully crossed and tied together; then a bill, about something which was stolen, lost, or strayed, you cannot tell how long ago, for the date has slipped down. This is accompanied by another bill, announcing "Day and Martin's Blacking,"—not that they ever had any, for they found it come cheaper to make their own; but as the pane happened to be out, and it just fitted, it came in very handy, and the glazier lived above five miles off. This completes row the second, with the exception of a written paper, announcing "A Cotage too Lett Inkwire within." The bottom row it is almost impossible to describe, for it is made up of soap, and soda, and stone-blue; a pair or two of boots, ditto of shoes, a hat, and a little suit of corduroys; parcels which are supposed to contain every thing, though they have very much the appearance of bricks tied up in brown paper; a piece of bacon mounted on a lump of cheese; a half-quartern loaf, overhung by half-a-pound of candles, on both of which the effects of the hot sunshine are visible; two or three eggs which have been kept long enough, and made warm enough to contain little chickens; three onions, one of which is wizened, while the other two have begun to sprout; a mousetrap, a frying-pan, and a gridiron, with a tin saucepan, turned bottom upwards, and surmounted by a half-bladder of dirty-looking lard. These, with a notice that passengers and parcels are booked there for the Red Rover coach, make up about all you can see without a very minute examination. If you venture inside and ask for any thing, no matter what it is, they have it; but bless me! wherever can it be? it must be somewhere in one of these

drawers. John! John! John comes out of the little back parlour, he also is certain that it must be somewhere—he scratches his head, and tries to remember—has a recollection of Mrs. So-and-so having a penn'orth about six months back—knows he did it up, and put it away carefully—must be this—no, those are tin-tacks—must be that—deary me! they 're thimbles!—did n't know they had any—and had given an order for two dozen to come by the carrier on Saturday—Could n't you look in again in about an hour, or call next day? they should be sure to find them then. Perhaps it is a lead-pencil you want. They have black lead, but they reckon that wo'n't do. They have pens also, but, unfortunately, at that time are out of ink;—the last ink they had a great jar tumbled off the shelf, fell on it, and broke the ink-bottle; and it was very unfortunate, for it happened all to run into the drawer where they kept the moist sugar. Is there nothing else you want? a penknife, or a pail, or a penny box of paints? You shake your head, and say no—and bid good-by to the Village Shopkeeper.

Amid the life, and stir, and animation which the return of Spring has brought with it, we must not forget the Easter Holidays, as they are the first that come since old Christmas sat warming his hands beside the hearth. There are other faces, on the rivers and roads now, looking different to those which only go to and fro on their errands of business—numbers who sally out with no other motives than to see how the country looks after the return of Spring. You know them by the holiday smile which they wear upon their faces, by their ever "babbling about green fields," and opening flowers, and the sweet and sunshiny spots which they are on their way to visit. On the steamboats you hear their merry laugh; their conversation sounds above the shrill whistle and deep groaning of the railway-engine; it drowns the noisy clamour of the guard's horn behind the coach; and they give back shout for shout to the noisy welcome of the village children, who are out to play

in the busy streets through which they pass. What pleasure has it afforded me, in my happy rambles into the country, when issuing from some village inn, where I have located myself for a few days, I have been attracted by the noise of merry children to peep into some green and shady corner, and have there come unaware upon a group of little fellow-travellers, while they were busied in gathering flowers, and who have, at my unexpected appearance, scampered off in all directions, leaving their floral treasures scattered about upon the ground, until I had crossed the rustic style, and was far away beyond the high hawthorn hedge, behind which they were sheltered when I first approached! And sometimes, while wandering beside a clear stream, that went winding in and out like a silver thread, between meadows which were almost knee-deep in flowers, have I startled a little company of village children, as they were swimming their boat, or, further down, seen a group of larger boys venturing timidly into the cold water, and, by the shiver they gave, telling how much they wished for the summer sun to make the stream warmer. Others, by the wayside banks, were hunting for the beautiful empty snail-shells, which were streaked and varied with endless lines of gorgeous colours, looking not unlike some strange flower that had forced itself through the covering of dead leaves. Then, another pleasant sight was the first brood of young birds, which could scarcely fly half the length of a field without resting, and seemed almost afraid of venturing anywhere away from the high-sheltering hedges and the tall green trees; little things, that would fairly shrink again if only a dragon-fly went sailing by, and even looked upon the butterfly, which they would not, ere long, hesitate to make a meal of, with an eye of wonder. And often, in those very trees where the young birds sheltered, the old withered leaves, which had stood all the batter and storm of the past Winter, still hung, dead, and dry, and brown, amid the garland of fresh green with which the coming Summer

had adorned herself—looking like old age and youth congregated together; the one about to drop into the grave, and the other revelling in the full enjoyment of the morning of life.

There is another curious bird which I have not yet told you about, and which, they say, took its name from Canute the Dane; for, when cooked, it formed one of his favourite dishes. It is called the

KNOT.

You all remember Canute the Dane: it was he who rebuked his flattering courtiers, when, in their fulsome adulation, they told him that every thing was possible for him to accomplish, by ordering his chair to be placed near the sea-shore while the tide was rising, and commanding the waves to retire, as he still retained his seat until they begun to wash about his feet; when, turning round upon his flatterers, he said, "Confess ye now how frivolous and vain is the might of an earthly king compared to that Great Power, who rules the elements, and can say unto the ocean, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.'" Although this bird belongs to the class of sand-

pipers, it still retains its Danish name; and you will readily see the resemblance there is between the words Canute and knot, the former of which was anciently spelt knute. It is fond of frequenting marshes, and may often be seen in the neighbourhood of the sea; and sometimes, during a high tide, the rocks, in the northern parts of our island, are covered with them, and there they sit until the tide recedes, when they fly down and commence their search for food upon the beach. The knot is seldom above nine inches long, and weighs but little more than four ounces. The head, neck, back, and wings, are of a grey, ash colour; a dusky streak runs from the bill to the eye; and the wings are edged with white, varied with curved and dusky lines. It is very common, in the fens of Lincolnshire, though we have no proof that it builds in our island. Another bird, which may be found in the same locality, is the

TEAL,

the smallest of all the duck tribe, for it seldom weighs above twelve ounces, and rarely exceeds fourteen inches in length. It is, as you will see by the engraving, a beautifully marked

bird, for the bill is black, the neck and head bay, while on each side a rich green patch stretches backwards, bordered with a line of white, while the hinder part of the neck, back, and body, are finely varied with wavy lines of black and white. The other portions of its plumage being beautifully diversified with buff, brown, black, and glossy green, while the white breast is exquisitely dotted with round spots of black. Its nest, which is made of rushes, and lined with down, is generally built by the side of some pond. The eggs are about the size of those of a pigeon, and are of a dullish white colour, spotted with brown. The manner of capturing it is much the same as that which I have described in Winter, in taking the wild ducks; where a decoy is made covered with nets, and supported by hoops, all of which you will see by referring to the passage I have alluded to.

But were I to fill a whole volume, it would not contain half the interesting information I could give you about birds only: from the great eagle, that sweeps the sky with its broad wings, down to the little golden wren, which I have described, would intervene a long list of birds whose names I have not even mentioned, although I have made you acquainted with the habits of so many. And not a year elapses without naturalists making some new discovery, and adding fresh facts to the thousands which are already known respecting the habits of birds. As to insects, when I tell you that one gentleman found, within a very limited neighbourhood, and in a space of time not exceeding two months, near three thousand various species, and out of these many which he had never before seen in any collection, you will readily imagine what a wide field there is yet to explore before we are fully acquainted with this wonderful branch of natural history. The unpractised eye but sees them winging their way, or dancing in clouds in the air; the naturalist would capture them, and so arrange them in different species, that a common observer would in a moment be struck with their dissimilarity of appearance, and see at a

glance what a variety of distinct forms they present when thus classed in form and order. So it is with birds, and flowers, and even fishes, about which we know so little. There is, in every separate class, something varied and striking, and which, when rightly understood, shows how perfect is the order of creation in even the minutest forms.

What makes a country ramble so interesting is, that almost every time you go out you are sure to discover something new. If your walk extends beside a sequestered brook, there perhaps you see the water-rat swimming about, and stopping every now and then to nibble at a green leaf that keeps moving up and down, as rocked by every little ripple that passes; or some strange butterfly goes sailing away, of a different colour to any one you have ever before seen; or a flower arrests your eye, and you endeavour to learn its name. Perchance some strange-looking bird is perched upon a spray; for you are as likely to meet with one of these winged wanderers as the wisest naturalist that ever set out in quest of such strangers; and occasionally a rare bird or two visits some particular neighbourhood that is not met with anywhere else in England. In fact, it is almost impossible to wander any distance without making some fresh discovery.

All boys love Spring better than any other season of the the year; for, somehow, Summer seems to sink into it so imperceptibly, that however narrowly we look we can scarcely distinguish the change; for it seems but a continuation of Spring, only covered with more green, and marked with another race of flowers. Autumn also glides in upon Summer with a noiseless motion; though, to an observant eye, all these changes appear clear and visible. But Spring rises up from the nakedness of Winter, and arrests every eye by her coming; she appears even at our doors in crowded cities, and the cry of "Sweet primroses" tells us that her flowery feet are already upon the earth. For, even without journeying into the fields,

the twitter of the swallows upon the eaves proclaim her coming; and, above all, we see her bright cheerful face in the lengthening of the days—the sunbeams that come peeping in at the window, so early in the morning, in place of the gloom and darkness which, but a few weeks ago, hung around; and we recall the many sweet country spots which that bright sunshine is warming, and the thousands of beautiful flowers it is nourishing and bringing forth,

> "In the early, early morning, when the Summer sun doth shine,
> Before the red cock crows from the farm upon the hill,
> When we are all asleep, and all the world is still."
>
> TENNYSON.

It is also pleasant to notice the trees, as they become every week more thickly covered with leaves—to trace the broader opening of the buds, day by day, until at last high over our heads hangs the dark embowered roof, covering many an undiscovered bird's-nest, and sheltering numbers of callow young, which, but for this green curtaining, would fill the maws of hungry hawks and other birds of prey. Then the great brown bees, that belong to no hive, go booming past; and ever up amid the sunlight, in the branches, we catch glimpses of beautiful insects; while butterflies, of almost every hue, go fanning their mealy wings among the underwood, as if they had not yet made up their minds where to alight, amid such a sweet variety of flowers and twinkling of leaves. And ever there come, as if only to peep at you, the redcap, and the blackcap, and the yellow-hammer, and the white-throat, the grey-linnet, and the green-linnet, and a host of other birds, swinging for a moment at the end of some spray, where they warble a few brief notes, then dive off amongst the green branches to places only known to themselves. And you almost wonder, when you consider how far they fly away, at times, that they are ever able to find their nests again, in a great, green, old, pathless wood, where every tree seems to look

alike, and where you would soon be lost were you to venture as they do through thicket, and dingle, and deep-sunken dell, which no foot, saving that of the woodman and gamekeeper, ever traverse.

The morning skies of Spring are very beautiful, so blue and marbled, and broken into cloudy masses or groups, that are dyed with the richest colours when the sun rises. I have often fancied, as I have noticed those clustering clouds, gathering around the eastern sky, that they were humble vassals, waiting for the approach of the sun, who, when he arises from his couch, casts off his raiment of many colours, and scatters it amongst the clouds; for the sun never appears twice in the same dress—never seems to wear the same garments again; the dawn has ever a new pattern ready woven for him in her golden loom. Boys who lie late in bed cannot imagine the beautiful colours which hang about the morning skies of Spring and Summer about sunrise—cannot even dream of the splendour in which the east is robed before the round sun comes heaving up above the distant hills. No painter could ever imitate in colours, no poet describe in the most beautiful language, such magnificent skies as I have many a time witnessed at these seasons of the year—

> "Right against the eastern gate,
> Where the great sun begins his state,
> Robed in flames and amber light,
> The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
> While the ploughman, near at hand,
> Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
> And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
> And the mower whets his scythe,
> And every shepherd tells his tale
> Under the hawthorn in the dale."
>
> MILTON'S "L'ALLEGRO."

And here we must take our farewell of Spring, and journey further onward towards the pleasant land of Summer; for many

a flower has already faded, and many a young bird, by this time, flown; and others there are whose song ceased when the white may-blossoms were drifted away. The little lambs have grown taller and stronger, and their weak, pitiful bleating has taken a deeper tone. There is also a darker shadow about the trees, and on the hazels you can now see where the bunchy clusters will be hung. The green corn has put on its eary plume, the feathery grass has already begun to whiten, the violets of the early Spring are dead, and, saving in moist and shady places, the pale primroses are all withered and gone. In place of those young and delicate tints, which bore such a soft and tender appearance, we now begin to see the broader and bolder opening of Summer in all her beauty; and the Season, whose cheeks were before wan with the hues of snowdrops and lilies-of-the-valley, are now becoming flushed and tinged with the deep dye of the opening roses.

SUMMER

Summer—How anticipated at School—Description of Mowers at work—Haymakers—Beauty of the Hayfield—Wind rows—Hay-cocks—Rolling amongst the New-mown Hay—A Rural Meal—Land rail, or Corn-crake, described—Haymakers Returning Home in the Evening—Summer Morning—River-side Scenery—Boys Bathing—The Drowned Boy—Necessity of Learning to Swim—Going out to meet the Heygre, and our Boating Exploits—The Water-hen; its habits—Delights of Angling—An Adventure with a big Barbel—The Silver Hook—Anglers refreshing themselves—Some Account of Ducky Dent, and how he caught a Red Herring—The Water-rat—How we stormed a Wasp's Nest, and what we got for our pains—Curious construction of the Wasp's Nest—Beauty of a Summer Shower—Great Variety of Grasses—Battle between a Black Ant and Wasp—The Old Chair-bottomer, and his friend the Tinker—Village School-children—Kiss in the Ring—Soft Jimmy, and how he was taken in—Sheep-washing and Sheep-shearing—Abraham Axby, the old soldier; my Rambles with him through Warton Wood—The Old Forest Laws—Progress of Science—Weasels and Stoats; how a Hawk caught a Weasel, and a Weasel caught the Hawk—The Desolate Old Hall—John of Gaunt and his Daughter—The Cuckoo; its habits—An English Landscape—Peace and War—A Gipsy Encampment—Folly of Fortune-telling—Bottle-tits and their Nests—The Otter—Little Boy, the Fishmonger—The Grebe, a curious bird—The Old River-bed Insects—Caterpillars and their Nests—Caddis-worms, that build in water—The Mole; its habits and

WONDERFUL ENCAMPMENT—WILD-FLOWERS: WATER-LILY; HONEYSUCKLE; FOX GLOVES; CHARLOCKS; MEADOW-SWEET—THE TWO DEAF OLD MEN, AND THE ROGUISH NEPHEW—THE SNIPE—A PLEA FOR FROGS AND TOADS; THEIR HABITS DESCRIBED; TENACIOUSNESS OF LIFE—TADPOLES—CRICKET-PLAYERS—NOTTINGHAM FAMOUS FOR ITS CRICKETERS—SAWYERS; OLD DICK THE SAWYER, AND OUR THEATRICAL ADVENTURE—COUNTRY GAMES—THE HERON—BILLY MAIDEN, AN OLD SCHOOLFELLOW—ADVICE TO SCHOOLBOYS—WILD RABBITS—SUMMER FLOWERS: THE FORGET ME-NOT; CONVOLVULUS; THE PLEASURE CHILDREN FIND IN GATHERING FLOWERS; SINGULAR PROPERTIES OF CLIMBING PLANTS; BLUE CONVOLVULUS; SCARLET PIMPERNEL; BLUE HAREBELL; MALLOWS; PLEASANT ASSOCIATIONS WHICH FLOWERS AWAKEN—WONDERS OF GEOLOGY—CHESTNUT; CORN-COCKLE; OX-EYE; BLUE-BOTTLE—SCARECROW—BIRD-BOY TENTING THE CORN; HIS SOLITARY LIFE AND THE AMUSEMENT HE FINDS—THE FARM-HOUSE AT THONOCK—SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY; SILENCE OF THE SCENE; WOODS ON THE SABBATH—WATER-CRAKE—COUNTRY CHURCH-YARD—DESCRIPTION OF THE BITTERN—SUMMER EVENING, A POEM—THE DISSATISFIED MAN OF GLENTWORTH—HEDGEHOG—THE SQUIRREL—DESCRIPTION OF THE LAPWING, OR PEEWIT—OLD PEEWIT—THE END OF SUMMER.

The Summer sun shines bright to day,
The bee among the flowers doth stray,
The bird is singing on the spray,
While in the fields the new-mown hay
Throweth its fragrance every way.

SUMMER is come again, bright and beautiful as it ever cometh, for the trees and flowers never looked more lovely than they do now; and although man sinned against his Maker, and was driven from the Garden of Eden—that garden in which the angels walked, and conversed with Adam—still God, in His goodness, adorned the hills and fields, with leaves and blossoms, as beautiful as we can imagine ever waved in Paradise, that their presence might gladden our hearts, and call forth our praise and gratitude, while looking upon the wonderful workmanship of His hands.

Many a time while at school have we talked about this delicious season, often wondering if we should find the young birds hopping about the neighbourhood of the old nest, in the same green hawthorn hedge, where they had built year after year; and often have we fancied that we could hear the sheep bleating beside the brook, where they had been driven to be washed;—we imitated the shout of the glad cuckoo, and recalled the very spot where we heard her singing in the sunshine, as she stood perched upon the topmost bough of the old ash tree. We assembled in little groups, and planned many an excursion in our minds, to places where hundreds of sweet wild flowers grew, to solitudes where the water-hen swum, and built, and dived, and reared her young; where the tall bulrushes waved, and the bending water-flags nodded to their shadows in the clear stream. Our memory flew back to the green straggling lanes, and fields that sloped down from the foot of many a rounded hill; to mornings when the world seemed bathed in sunshine, and the smell of the hawthorn mingled with the sweet breath of the cows, as we drove them homeward at milking time—or mounted on the broad-backed horses, rode them to water in the clear pool beside the wood, before they dragged the heavy wagon into the hay-field. In fancy we saw the wide village green, where the cricketers were wont to assemble, and the bank by the river side, where we spent so many happy hours in angling; for old home-scenes and healthy pastimes, seemed to arise before us with a pleasanter look, as the summer holidays drew nearer; and our hearts beat lighter as we hailed the season of birds and flowers; and forests with their rich perfume, and skies hung with blue, where clouds change from silver to purple, then become golden as they gather around the setting sun—for to us summer was ever the happiest season of the year.

Up and away, then, "my merry men all," as Robin Hood says to his foresters in the old ballad, and we will ramble

together through the fields and woods, over many a high hill, and beside many a pleasant brook, and talk about the wonderful things which we are sure to meet with in our way. We will gaze upon the great oak which seems to grow up into the very sky, and examine the graceful form of the small cup-moss which is scattered around its twisted roots on the earth; look upon the huge ox that lows in the meadows, and shakes the earth with its heavy tread; and talk about the little harvest mouse, which would not more than weigh down a farthing were it placed in the opposite scale. We will visit the spot where the fierce hawk builds its nest, and show you the home which the titmouse erects for her young ones. We will leap, and run, and shout, and sing that little woodland song of Shakspere's, until we make the old hills echo again, as they ring back the chorus, while we merrily exclaim, from the very joyousness of our hearts,

"Under the greenwood tree,
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither—come hither."

What a "rasp, rasp," do those mowers make as they sharpen their scythes. Hark! how the sound is echoed back from yonder wood; let us pause a moment, and watch them while they mow down the bladed and tufted grass, and all the beautiful array of wild flowers. Look how firmly each man plants his foot upon the ground; what a regularity there is in the bending of their bodies, and the swinging of their arms—all moving like one man, step for step, stroke for stroke. By glancing down the field you may count the number of "swathes," which tell the width swept down, by every stroke of the scythe, from where the first cut began, to where the last sweep ended; wave above wave does the grass lie in endless succession, as if the wind had blown the broad sur-

face of a lake into ridges, and left them heaped up without motion.

The mower has no time to pause and look at the many things which would delight us; he takes no notice of the little mice which run squeaking every where, of the young birds whose nest he has laid bare and open to the sunshine, cutting down the feathered grass which closed all around it, and shut it up in green on every side, so that even the hovering hawk, as he balanced himself on his wings, (although his eye is so sharp that he could almost see a single hair as it laid upon the ground), was never able, with his keen glance, to discover that nest, filled with the half-fledged young ones. He takes no notice of the flowers which at every sweep he prostrates to the ground—the golden buttercup, the silver daisy, the tufted clover, white and red, the purple vetch, the fragrant meadow-sweet, and the cuckoo-flower, are all buried together, ridge upon ridge, soon to be piled into wind-rows, heaped into hay-cocks, then thrown upon the creaking wagon, and borne away, load after load, to the rick-yard, and there preserved until the fields no longer furnish forth pasturage for the cattle.

Further on, we find the hay-makers busy at work, for there the grass was mown down a week ago; the farmer is in the field amongst his labourers, and as he is an old acquaintance of ours, we will venture in at the open gate. Take up that fork, and toss the hay about as wide and as far as you can, no matter how high you heave it, the higher the better, so that the wind may pass through and dry it thoroughly. While you are busy here, I will take up the rake and draw closer together what was spread out yesterday to dry, and soon we shall form a long bank of hay, the whole length of the field; and these in the country are called "wind-rows," piled high and light, that the wind may blow through, and the sun shine upon them—and a beautiful sight is a large field with fifty or a hundred of these rows, running in a white line from hedge to hedge, like

a sleeping sea, the green spaces between, the trough of the waves, which seem motionless, and yet to be like it the sea must be still, which it never is. Now we will take up a fork a piece, and, commencing at the end of one of these wind-rows, roll it together, as we would a large snow-ball in winter, over and over; heavier and heavier it becomes, until it gathers into a large haycock, high as our heads: and now, after all our trouble, what say you to a somerset—head over heels, away we go, up this side and down the other; here 's one of our companions already buried in the midst of it, another armful or two of hay, and not a bit of him will be seen. Warm work this, my boys; and we can scarcely proceed for laughter. Look how John shakes himself as he creeps out from the other side of the haycock, scattering the hay every where, like a water-spaniel that has been swimming in the river: there is no fear of our breaking any bones here, though we are all again down together. But what is this compared to loading the wagon? Just look what forkfuls the men lift up at a time—half a haycock at once—until their forms seem buried under so large a bulk. Theirs is indeed a happy life!

Hungry! ah, there is no wonder at that. Let us see what our friend the farmer has got stored up yonder at the foot of that old tree — bread and cheese and ham, and a wooden keg of excellent ale—what can we have better?—and all offered to us with a hearty welcome. But beware of the dog, for we must not proceed too near him without his master's permission; for he keeps as safe a guard over his treasures, as a sentry would over the crown jewels in the tower of London. A word from the farmer, and the dog is friendly with us in a moment; he has done his duty, has given up his charge to his master, and he covets no more than that friendly pat of the back, which tells him plainer than language could speak, that he has been faithful to his trust. Listen! that is the voice of the

LAND-RAIL, OR CORN-CRAKE,

which I can compare to nothing else than drawing the thumb-nail sharply across the teeth of a comb, only a hundred times louder than any noise we could make on such an instrument. Country lads call it the corn-crake or meadow-crake. Were we to pursue it, it would be still in a moment; and the next time we heard it, it would be far away from the spot where it is now, for it will squat amidst the long grass motionless as a stone; and I remember seeing one whose head had been cut off by a mower's scythe, whilst it sat nestling amid the unmown grass. You rarely see it take to its wings, for it glides onwards from one spot to another, without once soaring above the waving surface of the meadow. It generally builds its nest upon the ground, and lays from twelve to twenty eggs. Its back is of a beautiful brown colour, barred with black; while the under parts are of a pale yellowish brown, almost softened into white beneath the belly, with about as much tail as some of the charity school boys in London have to their coats, that is just enough projecting to take away the name of jacket. We have heard a score of them at a time creeking together in the rich meadow-lands which stretch beside the Trent in Lincolnshire. It is a most difficult bird to capture, and we never remember having seen one that was tame. Some say they are much

finer eating than a partridge, but for our part we would much rather hear their "creek, creek," as we do now, than sit down, and make our dinner off them.

It would form a pretty picture were we stay here until nearly sunset, and watch the

HAYMAKERS RETURNING HOME

in the evening; to see them in their rustic costumes threading their way along yonder winding road. One carrying a rake, another a hay-fork, a third with the bottle and basket swinging over his shoulder—their faces browned with the hues of health and labour; to see them drop off one by one, just where a

thatched cottage appears here and there in the landscape, half hidden amid the surrounding trees. They will need no opiate to send them to rest; the blackbird and the throstle will sing their evening hymn, and as the twilight shadows settle down into a deeper blue, the voice of the nightingale will perchance be heard chanting her "tirra-lirra" around their homesteads. In the morning, while the dew is yet hanging upon the rose, the speckled lark, starting from its slumber beside the daisy, will hymn its early matin high in the air, and pour forth a flood of song, which shall cause the awakened labourer to peep out from his lattice, half buried in woodbine, and thank God for the coming of another day which seemeth so favourable to the gathering in of the hay-harvest: for beautiful is the opening of morning, when the tall tree-tops are first gilded with the slanting sun-beams, which seem to quiver as they shine. Oh! what a noise do the birds then make in the woods! what a humming of insects there is in the air, and a sweet singing sound amongst the waters! you hear the bird-boy's whistle, and the milk-maid's song, and catch the murmuring the bees make amongst the flowers, as they come out light, and return home laden with honey to their hives! And many celebrated men I can tell you have not thought their time ill-spent in watching the habits of these curious insects; they select a season for swarming, waiting even for days, when the weather is unfavourable; and it is believed by many, that they first send out scouts to select a spot suitable for the swarm to alight upon. No sovereign rides forth with a greater train of attendants than a queen bee; for she has her outriders, her spies, and generals, her armed troops who hem her in every way, guarding her with watchful and jealous eyes; and where she once alights, there the whole army settle down, until it is almost a marvel that they do not kill her with the very weight of their kindness. If not recaptured and again placed in their hives, they will often commence forming their honey-comb in

the hollow bole of a tree; and there are instances on record in which they have begun to build their cells on an open and unsheltered bough.

What a pleasant walk have we here along the banks of this cool river! and at this secluded corner, behold there are a number of

BOYS BATHING.

Unless you can swim well, never venture into deep water. I well remember, when a boy, being present when one of our companions was drowned. He ventured out too far, and the current of the river carried him off his feet. Although there was no hole, nor dangerous spot where we were bathing—for a man seven feet high might have walked out foot by foot, and not lost more than two or three inches of his height in the water at a stride, so gradual and sure was the slope of the gravel bed—yet the torrent swept this poor boy off his feet, and he was drowned!

The scene rises as vividly before me as if it had but happened yesterday. I remember well it was his birthday; in

honour of which, his fond mother had allowed him to put on his Sunday clothes. It was after dinner when we went out for a walk. His mother bade us not stay very late, and invited two or three of us (his chosen playmates) to come home with him to tea. She had made a large plum cake to celebrate his birthday, for he was their only child. I forget now who it was that first proposed we should go and bathe. It was in June; a beautiful hot sunshiny day; so, instead of going to the Long Plantation, a bird-nesting, as we at first intended to do, we turned off at Ashcroft Dike, passed the old oil-mill, and wandered on the banks of the river, over a field or two, until we arrived at the Gravel-Bed, our favourite bathing place. We placed our clothes, as usual, carefully under the willows on the bank, one or two kindly throwing down their every-day garments, that our companion might put his Sunday clothes upon them, and so preserve them from being soiled. I was reckoned a good swimmer, and, if I remember rightly, made my way at once across the deep river. Greatly have I regretted this since, for, saving myself, there was but another amongst us who could swim, and he was close upon my heels when the alarm was given that our comrade was drowning. The river Trent, in which we were bathing, is rather wide; and as I was resting myself on the opposite bank, I did not at first clearly comprehend what had happened; for no young savages ever yelled or shouted louder at the sight of a white man, than we were wont to do whilst bathing. It was the silence which followed that alarmed me most, and I swam back again with a heavy heart; for, without being told, I knew that something had happened. On the bank the group of boys was huddled together, some crying, others silent,—all sorrowful. My companion who could swim assisted me, and we dived for him in turns, until we were compelled to lie down on the shore, breathless and exhausted, and almost black in the face through our exertions. I shall

carry the scar to my grave which marks the wound I then received, through the cap of my knee striking against a stone while searching for him at the bottom of the river. It was a melancholy picture was that scene on the banks of the Trent; and such a one I hope it will never be my lot to witness again! We looked over the water, on which the sunshine streamed, trying to fix upon the very spot where he last arose, as if we expected to see him appear once more; but the river rolled on as smoothly as if it had never closed over a human being. After waiting long, we dressed ourselves in silence, each eying the clothes which our companion would never wear again. Then we began to ask one another, who would undertake the painful task of carrying home the clothes of the drowned boy.

At length we divided his garments amongst us: his little waistcoat was borne by one, his jacket by another; each carried something, from his neckerchief, to a single boot. We entered the town by the back way, as being less frequented; we passed the school, where he had that very morning received a reward of merit. One of us went and informed the schoolmaster of his death. We left his clothes in the school-room, and good Parson Freedom was sent for; and he carried the sorrowful tidings to the poor drowned boy's mother. I have heard the neighbours say it was a heart-breaking scene; that she had been to the door many times to look for us; had cut up the plum cake, and prepared the tea;—but that day none of us dared to venture near her. It was several days before the dead body of our companion was discovered, when most of his schoolfellows attended the funeral. It was the first heavy sorrow that many of us had ever felt, for he was a great favourite with us all.

Mark where that boat comes slowly along, drawn by the horse which traverses the hauling path. There is a look of mischief about the man who drives the horse. See, he has

checked its speed; the hauling-line is slack, and sweeps up the boys' clothes, who are too happy in the water to pay any attention to what is passing on the land. A smart stroke of the whip, and the rope is again on the full stretch, a perfect clothes-line—jackets, trowsers, and shirts, there they dangle! the man laughing heartily, and seeming to take no notice of the

BOYS IN PURSUIT OF THEIR CLOTHES,

as they hurry out of the river, and endeavour to regain their garments. Now a jacket is shaken off, and picked up; and after having led them a chase the whole length of a field, the driver (who pretends he is not aware of what has occurred) at last stops his horse, and restores to them the remainder of their clothes. Then commences a hunt for a lost knife, a pencil-case, or something or another, which has fallen out of their pockets while the hauling-line had possession of their garments; and those who have lost nothing, are laughing at the fun, though they are good-natured enough to assist their companions in the search.

Again I would warn you never to venture into deep water unless you can swim, or have some one with you that can, and who is ready to keep a close watch in case of an accident. Not that swimming is at all difficult to learn, if a boy has courage enough not to mind being soused head over ears a few times in safe and shallow water; but he may try to swim just as well where it is only a yard deep, as if he ventured up to the neck. Never, while learning to swim, venture into a strong current, for fear of being swept off your feet. Wade as far in at first as you can with safety; then turn, with your face towards the shore, and try to make a stroke. Any boy who can swim will be proud to show you how to strike out with the hands and feet, at the same moment of time. Once learn to draw up the knees, and throw back the legs when you launch out the arms, and open the hands to strike, and you will soon be able to swim. Corks, planks, bladders, and such like things, are very well for the timid; but a courageous boy will sooner learn without such assistance, and will swim all the better afterwards through never having used them. Above all, remember that every boy may soon swim, if he will but try.

We have said nothing about bathing as conducive to good health, beside being of itself a noble exercise. If you can swim, what a triumph it is to know that you can cross a deep river without the aid of a boat! But, oh! the proud feeling, to be conscious that you are almost as safe in the water as on land; to look at a river, and be able to say, "I neither care for your being deep nor strong; I can toss your waters aside by the strength of my arm; and, in spite of your roaring and rolling, master you. You may carry me a few yards lower down by your power; but I can get across for all that, by swimming, like a fish, with my face against the stream! Here goes for the tree opposite—hey! and back again, old river (by God's permission), in spite of your strength!"

Oh! how cool, and healthy, and lively one feels after a good swim, especially if we do not stay in the water too long! Byron was almost as proud of having swum across the Hellespont, like Leander of old, as he was of having written "Childe Harold;" nay, he boasted more of having accomplished the former feat, than he was ever known to do about the best poem he ever wrote, for it was a deed which no coward dare have ventured upon: and courage is a grand thing for either man or boy to possess, so long as they never make a foolish use of it. If Nelson never knew what fear was in his boyish days, depend upon it he was not so well acquainted with danger, as he was in his after-life.

But I have not yet told you of our

BOATING EXPLOITS,

and the dangers we often encountered when we went out to meet the tide. There are not many rivers up which the tide —or Heygre, as it is called in the country—comes; and those who never before beheld such a sight, would be struck with fear

and astonishment. Fancy yourself in a boat on a broad, calm river, in a still summer's evening, borne gently along by the current, and scarcely a ripple on the smooth surface of the water, saving what is made by the swallow as it every now and then dips down. Away you go, laughing and chatting, and leaving the boat to its own lazy motion, just gliding along as it likes past the old town, beyond the last wharf, below the white mill; away and away, between winding banks, where willows are ever waving; between sweet meadows, where flocks bleat, and herds low; leaving one village on the right hand, and another on the left, and still moving along with a kind of dreamy, idle motion, just as the water wills it, just as the boat chooses to drop down;—when, hark! hush! what sound is that, which comes like the first roaring of a storm through the forest? Although it is yet above a mile off, you hear that low, sullen roar, deepening every moment as it draws closer. Louder and louder—nearer and nearer it approaches. Then you hear a distant shout of human voices; sailor calling to sailor, ship answering to ship; onward and onward the alarm is sounded, repeated by the boat above you, as you send downwards the cry of "Ware Heygre!"—which is taken up and echoed by every boat upon the river for miles away. Steady, boys! "swape" her head half round, so that her nose shall just plough the high hill of water which is coming down thundering upon us. How awful it looks!—a huge wall of water swelling within twenty feet of us, as if some huge monster, large as the hills, had suddenly risen from the deep river-bed, and that was the swell he made before heaving his gigantic and hideous head above the surface of the river! Fear not, my boys; we pardon your looking a little pale, as this is the first time you have been out on such an adventure. Steady, steady! we shall be upset if you all rush to the opposite side of the boat, and she will be turned bottom upwards in a moment. Be firm! fear not, move not!

Hold on by the "thofts" and sides as firmly as you like; but, at the peril of your lives, move not! It comes! Bang! dash!—up in the air, and down with a plunge that almost makes us dizzy. Steady, round with her head—and we are off like an arrow from a bow, half filled with water, it is true, and drenched to the very skin; but ours is a good, strong, deep boat, made for the stormy sea service; and we have an old rusty saucepan at the bottom, ready to bale her out with. So, hurrah, my boys! for now we have nothing to fear. What a pace we go! By Jove, it is like dashing down the Falls of the Niagara! There never was a vessel in the world went quicker through half a mile of water, than we have done. What a grand sight! was it not? The very trees on the bank seemed to be flying in the air, so rapidly did we dart past them; and as for the houses, every window seemed to dance by in long lines of light! Oh! a pleasant place to live beside, is a noble river like the Trent, where the great black porpoises come up out of the sea to look at you, and the immense sturgeons every now and then make such a swell in the water beside your boat, that you would hardly be astonished if a whale came next, whipped out his tail, and gave you a whack with it. "And dare you," asks some young reader, "swim and bathe in such a river?" "Dare we? Ah!" we answer, "that we dare!"—and have seen little urchins in the water, seven or eight years old, "naked and undismayed," pelting a porpoise almost as big as an elephant, and regretting they could not get near enough to drop a little salt on its tail. Caught? Ah! that they are, very often—dragged to shore, carried off in a wagon, shoved in the stable of some village inn, which lies far away from the river, and shown at a penny a head to the wondering rustics!

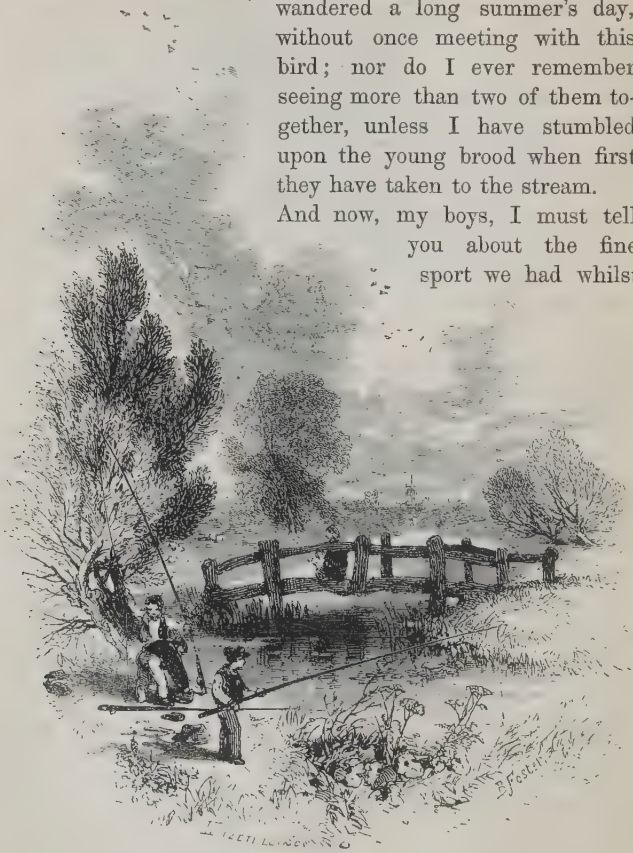
Observe that dark-looking bird, swimming about beneath the shadow of the sedge; it is the

WATER-HEN,

which sometimes builds its nest so near the edge of the water, that after heavy rains it is often carried away, or buried beneath the stream. It is a wild solitary bird, selecting the most dark and gloomy spots to build in; and its nest is often occupied by the water-rat. Were a large pike to make its appearance, the water-hen would quickly hurry to her nest for shelter, for fear the pike should snap her up at a mouthful; her young ones are frequently devoured by fish, for they take to the water soon after they are hatched; and, no doubt, through their being exposed to so many dangers whilst young, is the cause why the species are so scarce, and so seldom seen. Observe, what a rich red there is about the base of the bill, and what a clear white it shows underneath the tail, as it dives, or turns to and fro in the shadow of the overhanging willow. Its nest has a very rugged appearance, and is composed of flags or rushes, and such aquatic weeds as grow beside the pool: the eggs, which vary from five to seven or nine in number, are of a dirty yellow colour, and look as if they were spotted with rust. I wish I could show you her young, but it is too late, unless she has built a second time—

such little black downy things you never saw; they look like so many rats sailing about in the water. We might have wandered a long summer's day, without once meeting with this bird; nor do I ever remember seeing more than two of them together, unless I have stumbled upon the young brood when first they have taken to the stream.

And now, my boys, I must tell you about the fine sport we had whilst



ANGLING

in the streams and sluices which fall into this beautiful river Trent. Every mile or so, as you walk on its banks, you meet

with great flood-gates, which can be opened or shut to keep the water and fish in, or to let them out at pleasure. And, as we have before said, these great water-courses, called sluices, dikes, or delfs,—which latter is an old Saxon name for a place that has been dug out,—go for miles through the wide marshes and rich pastures, and are filled with almost all kinds of fresh-water fish:—bearded barbel; red-finned roach; prickly perch; pike, with enormous jaws, and heads like crocodiles; and spotted tench, grayling and gudgeon; eels, that were wont to hide under stones, break our lines, swallow our hooks, and then escape; bleak, which we caught to bait our bottom lines with; and I cannot tell how many other kinds of fish, which were found in abundance in these pleasant inland streams. And I can tell you, we were never fast for a fishing-rod, where so many beautiful willow-trees grew; but up we clomb, and cut down one which was small, and straight, and tapering; a pennyworth of strong twine from the grocer's, formed our fishing-line; we made an excellent float out of an old pen and a cork; fastened our hooks, of all sizes, to the long horse hairs which we twisted with our own hands; and as for baits, we had only to go to the fell-mongers for gentles, or dig in the surrounding banks for worms. We were well acquainted with the deeps and shallows; knew, to an inch, how to adjust the float, so that we might either angle for top or bottom fish: and we have carried home many a good fry in our day. Oh! it was a pleasant life was this angling, on that beautiful river, or amid these sequestered streams; so exciting if you chanced to have a bite from a big barbel,—and I will tell you now, how a big fish once served me.

I had placed my rod upon the bank for a moment, to pick up a fish I had caught, which was dancing, and jumping, and leaping, and at every spring getting nearer and nearer to the river, and would, at another bound or two, no doubt, had I not quickly have removed him, regained his

native element. Well, do you know, just as I had succeeded in throwing him a good way out amongst the grass again, with the other fish I had caught, which lay scattered here and there and every where, another boy, who was angling at a little distance, but had his eye on my float at the same time, exclaimed, "Oh, there's such a bite at your line!" I turned round in time enough to see my rod swimming out in the river, for the fish was so strong that it had actually pulled the rod from off the bank. Away went the fish, with the hook in its jaws, further and further out into the river, occasionally pulling, for a moment or two, a portion of the rod under water. Along the bank we ran, watching the progress of the rod as it went floating down the current, now dragged a little on this side, then again on that, just as the fish swam and struggled with the strong hook imbedded in its jaws. There was an old-fashioned ferry house two or three fields off, beside the river; and thitherward we hastened with all the speed we could, to get out the ferry boat, and regain again, if possible, my fishing-rod. The honest ferryman was as worthy and good-hearted an old soul as ever broke bread, and was as much delighted with the adventure as we ourselves were; and when he saw the rod come sailing down in the sunshine, with the top bobbing at intervals under the water, he exclaimed, "By gum, that's a whacker, I'll be bound! A ten or a twelve pounder, I'll take my appydavy on it!"—meaning, no doubt, affidavit. Ah! you should have seen us push out with the boat! How anxiously we watched for the rod, as it floated nearer! How the boat kept dropping down the stream! How the rod crossed first on one side, then on the other! How we stretched over the boat side! How the old ferryman stood with the boat hook in his hand, ready to get hold of the fishing-rod as soon as he could; and how, at last, he did get hold of the rod, and said, "By gum, it is a whacker!"—and how, after a long time, and a deal of patience, we saw the

great barbel sprawling at the bottom of the ferry boat, and banging about as if it would have driven a hole through the bottom if it could. That was the largest barbel I ever saw caught, and was more than the old ferryman and his family could eat at a meal.

Then you should have seen us after a day's angling, when getting a small willow-twig, we twisted it, and tying a kind of knot or loop at the thick end, to prevent the fish from falling off, we thrust the smaller part through the gills, for they had all been dead a long time then, and commenced stringing them,—beginning with the larger fish first, and diminishing their size as the string became shorter, from the huge barbel at the bottom to the little bleaks at the top, "small by degrees and beautifully less." Were n't we proud when we walked into the town or village, with such a row of fish thrown over our shoulder—twenty or thirty!—ay, even sometimes more on the same string? Then old Uncle John used to joke us so, and anger us, and say that we had been fishing with the silver hook, which means buying the fish from other boys who had caught them. Now, you know, this was too bad when we had caught all the fish ourselves. Not but that there are plenty of boys who, through either being indifferent anglers, or having had what they call bad luck, would not hesitate, if they had the money, to buy up the fish which their poorer companions had caught, and taking them home, perhaps without exactly telling a story, would say, "See! what luck we have had to-day!" This, as we have before said, is what Uncle John called "fishing with the silver hook!"

Yet it was n't the fish alone that we cared so much about after all; but the pleasure we enjoyed, the fresh air, the sweet sunshine, the green trees that quivered and twinkled as they overhung the water, the willows that waved, and the bulrushes and water-flags that bowed and nodded and swayed to and fro lower down beside the water's edge, and the little birds that

all day long kept flying in and out of these shady and sedgy recesses—to watch the weeds waving, and the birds, afforded us quite as much pleasure as angling. Then it was so delightful to wander home in the tranquil summer evenings, passing the haymakers and the groups of country people who had been out all day working in the fields, and sometimes to see such pretty little road-side pictures,—a young girl, perchance, milking, by the side of some green hawthorn hedge, or under the shadow of an old majestic tree, singing to herself like a bird, and making us think that there is no happier state of existence than a country life. Then a consultation was held amongst us, and all the bread we could muster was turned out, pieces that had been in our hats or pockets all day, or had lain in our hankerchiefs on the bank, and got dried in the sunshine, which we had handled with our fishy fingers, not altogether free from dirt,—all these were turned out, for every mouthful was precious now, and we bargained with the pretty milkmaid for many a dishful of her white, foamy, warm new milk, which we drank from such a clean wooden dish, white and thin, and shaped like an immense saucer. Oh! what a delicious meal that was! How sweetly did the dirty and fishy bread go down! All the dainties we ever tasted in after days can never be named beside those dirty and delicious morsels; and when we had no money, we gave her one of our largest fish—just as Izaak Walton did in his day, above two hundred years ago, when he drank a draught of red cow's milk, and chatted with pretty Maudlin and her honest mother, as he himself tells us in his delightful book on angling.

But I must now tell you a good story about Ducky Dent, who was n't altogether so sharp as he might have been. We used to say he was born about five-and-twenty minutes too late. His fond old mother never called him any thing but Ducky. Now, her Ducky, at the time we are about to bring him before

our readers, could not be a day less than forty years old; and we used to call him a tough Ducky! He shaved once a week, and on a Saturday had a beard like a Billy-goat; a little snub-nose, that cocked up like a button-topped mushroom; a good-natured squint in both eyes, quite able, as the saying is, to look round a corner. He was also knock-kneed, and stuttered dreadfully. Had you met him in the street for the first time, you would have stopped and laughed at him with all your might; for boys cannot help laughing sometimes, when they see such an odd countenance. He was the very image of some funny little old man, such as you see occasionally upon a jug, or stuck upon a mantel-piece; but, as his dear old mother said, "a better hearted cretur was never king of England;" and she was right. She rushed one day into Nanny Harrison's, her next door neighbour, in such a pleasing pucker, that, as Nanny said, it quite did your heart good to see her, and exclaimed, "Hey, Nanny, lass! they say my Ducky's soft; but he isn't. I'd proof o' that to-day, when I was ironing; for he came, and took up one o' my hot irons, and laid it down again in a moment, without my telling him! Now, you see, Nanny, if my Ducky had been soft, he would have kept it in his hand until it had burnt him; and not laid it down, like a sensible lad as he is. If any body ever says, he's soft, Nanny, tell 'em that; then see whether they wo'n't say he's sharp enough, or not!"

Ducky Dent was, however, a famous fisherman, and the best setter of bottom lines along the river. You know what a bottom line is—a great long strong string, with hooks fastened to it, about three or four feet apart from each other; one end of this you fasten down with a stout peg at about low water mark, by the river side; then making a stone fast to the other end, you throw the stone as far out as you can into the river—line, hooks, and all, following as a matter of course, and there you leave it all night, when the tide sets in, and makes

deep water for yards above it. Next morning you go again at low water to see what there is on the hooks, for remember that it has been fishing by itself all night long. Well, you know, one night Ducky Dent having set his bottom line, and we having watched until he went away, took up the line, fastened a large red herring to one of the hooks, and threw it in again, just as he himself had before done. Fancy his astonishment next morning, when he came to take up the bottom line, and found on it a pike, an eel, and a red herring—the first red herring, as he said, he had ever caught before in his life; and it had such a funny mouth too, and smelt just like those you bought in the shops. He showed it to every body he knew, and every body, of course, laughed heartily; some advising him in future to bait with boiled potatoes; at all events, it satisfied Ducky Dent that a salt, dried, red herring was a fresh water fish; for, as his mother said, "he had caught it himself, and nobody could deny that!"

THE WATER-RAT

is a beautiful animal, which we often saw when angling,

and which frequents our brooks and river sides. It is an expert swimmer and diver, and you would be delighted to see it paddling about in the water; raising its short thick head, and peering up with its small dark eyes, then nibbling off a leaf here and there, and plunging to the bottom the moment it is alarmed; for a water-rat lives entirely upon vegetables and roots, and such water plants as grow about its haunts; and all that is said about its eating fish and destroying young ducks, is untrue: a more harmless and inoffensive animal cannot be found on the banks of our rivers. Were we to examine this bank narrowly, we should no doubt discover the hole somewhere about, which leads to its nest. And you 'd be astonished were you to take a long thin willow, which would bend every way, to find the immense depth to which those holes extend: but what is the most curious of all, the hole which leads to its nest is sometimes beneath the water; so that the rat has but to dive down and enter it, and, as the hole is made to ascend above the water into the bank, after having dragged his furry coat through a foot or two of water at the bottom of his hole, he soon finds himself safe enough in his nest on dry land. I remember, when we were boys, being very much puzzled about this, for we had often watched two water-rats swimming about at the foot of a bank, which was free from sedge and willows, for a considerable distance, yet, when they dived, and we had lost sight of them, they did not appear again sometimes for an hour or more; and this, I can assure you, puzzled us very much, for we knew it could not remain under water above a minute or so without coming up to breathe. As it was a dry summer, the water in the brook of course got lower every day; and when it sunk about a foot within its bed, it left bare and dry the hole which led to the nest of the water-rat, and into which we afterwards saw them enter many a time. It is very cruel to hunt and kill these beautiful and harmless little animals with dogs. I am sure a

kind-hearted boy would find much greater pleasure in watching their playful habits, as they swim about in the water, than in destroying them. Observant boys might add a great deal to our knowledge of natural history, if in their rambles they would watch more narrowly the habits of animals instead of delighting so much in killing them; for they are no doubt as happy in their way as we are in our own, and find as much pleasure in their play and recreation as the happiest group of boys who ever sallied forth to enjoy themselves in the wide range of the green fields. I should love that boy much better who would turn aside rather than tread upon a worm, than he who wilfully placed his foot upon it; for remember the great Shakspere has told us, that the "beetle we tread upon feels as great a pang as when a giant dies." And yet, after all this sermonising, I am afraid that I was not a bit better than other boys. I will tell you why.

You see that hole in the bank? years ago I remember the encounter we had there whilst storming a wasp's nest;—it was on a Wednesday morning, before school-time, and we wanted the grubs to fish with in the afternoon, which was our half holiday: so here we came, in the broad sunshine, while the whole of the armed host were flying in and out of the hole in the bank, beating around our heads, and threatening what they would do unless we decamped. Several of us were armed with green branches, with which we beat off the dreaded scouts, who began to murmur louder and louder every moment. We had made a long tube of smouldering paper, which was filled with powdered brimstone, and all that was necessary to be done was to thrust the tube into the mouth of the nest, set fire to it, and then close up the aperture. But who dare storm such a citadel, or head such a forlorn hope, when every moment scores of wasps were issuing out ready to do battle? We had heard that wasps could not sting through a silk handkerchief, so a boy was at last found who had

courage enough to cover his head with one, and drawing on a pair of old gloves, he went boldly forward and thrust the sulphurous tube, which was lighted and handed to him, into the hole; and scarcely had the smoke began to rise, before he came jumping off, and shrieking as if he himself was on fire. The wasps had stung through the silk, had got into his waistcoat, had surrounded us every way; not a spot was clear saving where the burning tube threw out its deathly smoke on the bank; and another lad was found bold enough, in the midst of the fight, to rush forward and thrust a large handful of wet clay on the mouth of the nest; when lo! they had another outlet, and out came the enraged host uninjured. What a battle had we then to fight; not one amongst us but was wounded: we slew scores, but still the ranks were filled up, for it was the "strongest" wasp's nest we had ever stormed. Some shrieked, some howled, others ran away, pursued by the winged enemy; some carried off the foe concealed in their dresses; eyes were soon to be closed up; lips swollen; necks and bosoms stung; hands rendered unbearable, for not one amongst our number escaped; and when we presented ourselves at the school-door, we were all ordered home, like so many soldiers who are sent after a battle to the nearest hospital. Some of us were put to bed, and the swollen places rubbed with honey; and more than one boy had his eyes sealed up, and was unable to see for a day or two: the pain we endured for a time was dreadful; nor did we after all succeed in carrying off the nest. Were we not rightly served? What right had we to attempt to burn and stifle the wasps in their nest? True, they are dangerous insects; yet they seldom sting any one unless they are first attacked, and then they can defend themselves to some purpose. Any boy who has burnt himself severely, may form a correct notion of the pain inflicted by the sting of a wasp; for although the latter is less dangerous in the end, yet it is equally painful whilst it

lasts. Their nests are very curious, and in form resemble the honey-comb, being full of cells, in which the white grubs are deposited: and you will be surprised when I tell you that they are the oldest paper-makers on record.

Reaumer states, that for twenty years, he endeavoured, without success, to discover the materials employed by Wasps in forming the blue, grey, papery substance, so much used in the structure of their nests. One day, however, he saw a female wasp alight on the sash of the window; and it struck him, while watching her gnawing away the wood with her mandibles, that it was from such materials as these she formed the substance which had so long puzzled him. He saw her detach from the wood a bundle of fibres, about the tenth of an inch in length, and finer than a hair; and as she did not swallow them, but gathered them into a mass with her feet, he had no doubt but that his opinion was correct. In a short time he saw her shift to another part of the window, and carry with her the fibres which she had collected, and to which she continued to add. He then caught her, and began to examine her bundle, and found that it was neither yet moistened nor rolled into a ball, as it is always done before used by the wasp in her building. He also noticed that before detaching the fibres, she bruised them into a kind of lint with her mandibles All this he imitated with his penknife, bruising and paring the same wood till it resembled the fibres collected by the wasp: and so he discovered how wasps manufactured their paper;—for these fibres are kneaded together into a kind of paste, and when she has formed a round ball of them, she spreads it out into a leaf, nearly as thin as tissue paper; and this she accomplishes by moving backwards, and levelling it with her mandibles, her tongue, and her teeth. And so the wasp forms paper, placing layer upon layer, fifteen or sixteen sheets deep, and thus preventing the earth from falling down into her nest.

There is nothing in Nature but what is worthy of observation; even a summer shower, if watched with an attentive eye, is highly interesting. It comes down all at once, in large downright drops; you may count every one within the space of a yard upon the spotted and dusty high-road; in a pond it is truly beautiful, making such a variety of circles, as if only to break them again in an instant; then it keeps up such a "pat, patting," amongst the leaves—you stand under a thick leafy tree, and can hear the pleasant rattling above your head, until drop after drop comes through and begins to fall upon the ground where you shelter, and which, when all around beside seemed soaked with wet, had hitherto remained dry. And that shower had, perhaps, been drawn up by a water-spout out of some large lake, or pond: and we have before now felt a frog come thump upon our hat in a summer shower. What! you exclaim, does it ever rain frogs? Ay, that it does; for as in the old game of "Take care of your heads!" "What goes up must come down." Why you see it stands to sense, that if the water-spout has sucked up a few hundreds of frogs from some marshy lake, they are sure to come down again with a "rattle at their heels," as the old women say, when they threaten to fetch home some truant. And oh! what a delicious odour hangs about the air after a refreshing shower; it seems as if the rain had called out a thousand fragrances, which had slept motionless amongst the leaves and flowers.

"Sunshine shower,
Rain for half an hour,"

used to be our song when we were boys, and wanted to get out to play; and then, if the sun did chance to break out again, and the sky to clear up, that was the time for a walk, no matter what hour of the day it might have been.

But really there are so many curious things to be seen during a ramble in summer, that I am afraid I shall never be able to make you acquainted with a twentieth part of them;

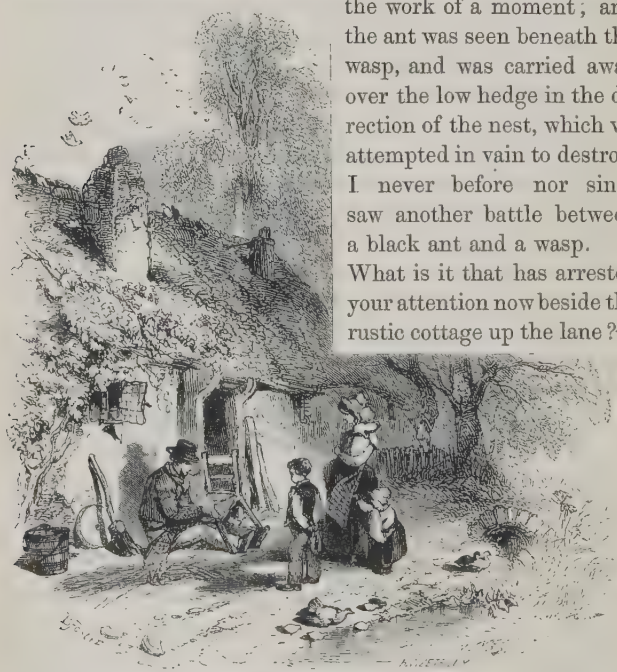
there is not a flower blows, however common it may appear to the eye, but what, when examined, shows such harmony and beauty in its construction, that you may, by a little study, identify it with an extensive class, all bearing a close resemblance to each other. You look over this unmown field, and nothing strikes your attention but the difference of colour amongst the wild flowers. You little dream of the beauty and variety there is amongst the grasses above, and that many of them are more exquisite in form and structure than the proudest flower that ever bloomed. Wheat is the monarch of grass, the king of all green and bladed things; and you will find his resemblance amongst a score of other grasses, the oat-grass, and the rye-grass, and many an eary-head that furnishes the birds with food. You never can mistake the species after having once noticed the straight unbranched stalk, with the narrow flag-like leaf, which starts from every knob or joint of the "straw," as if it was a portion of the stem, and which, upon examination, you will find it is, and that "peeling straws" is no impossibility: that, in the common grasses, which cattle browse upon, the more they eat the stronger the root becomes; and that in many kinds cattle leave untouched the straws that bear the seed and flower, which, when ripened, are blown out of the husk, and so left to sow themselves. But what is still more singular, those grasses, which grow on the tops of cold mountains where it is too bleak for the sun to perfect the flower, there the seed shoots up afresh from the old root, and the buds, which are formed during the winter, thus grow on independent of the new seed. We have not time now; but when we have, we will gather a handful of grass from some field, then sit down and count the different varieties which each has culled, and you will be delighted with the beautiful and silky flowers which many of them bear; nor will you ever after walk through a field without admiring the flowers of the grass.

Did you ever before see the nest of the large black ant? Here's a pile, looking as if the earth all about had been rolled into little round balls. Just thrust in the end of your stick, and hundreds will rush out in a moment. Beware of their bite; it is awful! I once threw a dead mole on this very nest; and the next day it was picked so clean, that you might have fancied the bones had been polished with some instrument. I know of no method by which you could obtain such clean and perfect skeletons of birds or small animals, as leaving them for a day or so on the nest of the black ant. Look at the one here, which I have touched; how he spars at me with his legs, seeming to sit down to it. I would not place my hand for a minute on that nest for a trifle.

I was once walking by here, when something came with a loud bang against my hat. I uncovered my head to see what it was, and beheld a large wasp carrying off a black ant. I shook them off into the middle of the road. Oh, what a struggle there was between them! The ant had got hold of one of the wasp's wings, and he could not rise. You should have seen what a fast hold he kept: it was like two boys pulling at a rope, as in the game of French and English; the wasp struggled to get his wing free; then the ant pulled as if he would have dragged the wing off; and so they kept at it for several seconds, till at length the wasp began to try other means to conquer his rebellious captive. For a dozen times did he then endeavour to get the ant under him, but in vain; the ant pulled with all his strength at the end of the wing he had seized upon, and so prevented the wasp from rising. If the latter, by the aid of the one wing which was free, managed to rise a few inches, he was quickly brought down to the ground again, by the strength and weight of the ant. The struggle lasted for several minutes, and neither seemed to obtain any advantage. You would have been astonished had you but seen into what attitudes the wasp wriggled its elastic body;

still the ant kept a firm hold on the right wing, and escape seemed impossible. At last, the wasp made a desperate effort, and, expanding its one wing, rose from the ground several times in rapid succession, each time bending its body into an arch, and endeavouring to get the ant undermost. The last fall seemed to have stunned its opponent. It was scarcely the work of a moment; and the ant was seen beneath the wasp, and was carried away over the low hedge in the direction of the nest, which we attempted in vain to destroy. I never before nor since saw another battle between a black ant and a wasp.

What is it that has arrested your attention now beside the rustic cottage up the lane?—



THE OLD CHAIR BOTTOMER.

He leads a happy life enough, no doubt. You see the small rushes which he every now and then mixes with the larger ones? Those are of English growth; such we saw beside

the river, and waving above the bank where we beheld the water-hen. He can always have plenty of those for the trouble of cutting them; the larger ones come from Holland. His is not so good a trade as it once was, for there are not so many chairs bottomed with rushes since cane seats came into fashion. Watch how nimbly and strongly he twists the rushes with his fingers; now in this corner, then in that, plat after plat is laid down; and every time he goes round the corner of the chair, the hole in the middle grows less. How merrily the ragged fellow whistles! What cares he? He carries his shop upon his back, and finds employment in every village he comes to. If he does his work well, he is sure of a glass of beer and a crust of bread and cheese. That woman keeps the village alehouse, and she has come to talk with him about mending and bottoming her chairs before the club-feast is held at her house. Rare quarters will he have there; and you will hear him singing in the kitchen, on an evening after he has done his work, like a linnet; and perhaps his old crony, the tinker, is at work somewhere in the neighbourhood, and will join him at night, when they will talk over the pleasant trips they have had together, the many beautiful villages they have seen in their rambles, and which is the pleasantest road to take if you wish to reach them. Wonderful things have these two happy old fellows seen in their travels; nests, and snakes, and water-newts, and great gledes, that carried off young chickens. They have chased young foxes and hunted young hares, and taken rooks' nests from the topmost branches of many a tall elm tree; and when they could get no work in autumn, you never saw what quantities of brown nuts and ripe blackberries they would bring home. No two boys were ever happier than they are, when out in the country together.

But I must tell you, that when the Village Club-Feast is held at the public-house, the village school children will also have their holiday, and go to church; and then come back to

the school-room, where they will have tea and plum-cake. Oh! how you would laugh to see those little rustics sit down to tea, many of them for the first time in their lives placed before a cup and saucer, and never having been used to any thing but their brown porringer and wooden spoon, from which they ate and drank their bread and milk. Poor little fellows! they will take hold of the saucer with both hands, and blow away, with swollen cheeks, until their tea is cool enough; and bite such mouthfuls out of their great plum-cakes, that it would delight you to watch them. Then, it would amuse you to see them in the evening, playing at

KISS IN THE RING

on the village green. All the boys and girls will take hold of hands and form a ring, leaving some girl or boy outside, who will walk round and round, and at length strike some one smartly on the back; then run in and out between the uplifted

and opened arms of those who form the ring, darting across the centre, and out on the opposite side; now threading their way in a zig-zag form, then shooting across again, and baffling the pursuer, who is compelled to follow the course of the leader, who, if she is a light-built girl, will lead the rustic youth a long chase before he can win the kiss which is his reward for overtaking her; for sometimes the girls in the ring, although they leave ample room enough for their fair companion, will lower their arms, or stand closer, when her pursuer has to pass; thus giving her time to make a turning or two which he has not seen; and if he once passes through a wrong opening, he is out, and must pay a forfeit. Some are of opinion that this is the old English game which is so often made mention of in our earlier poets; and, from the passages I have met with in their writings, I have come to the same conclusion.

Country feasts, and all such like merry-makings, are generally attended by some oddity or another; and I well remember a man called Soft Jimmy, who visited all the country wakes for miles around. He used to say, when asked where he lived, "that he was like a dog, and had his home everywhere." His residence was, I believe, in a neighbouring workhouse, from which they allowed him to go out whenever he pleased. They never could get him to work, for he was a sad lazy fellow. If they set him to weed the garden, he was sure to pull up all the flowers, and leave the weeds; and when they spoke to him about it, he only said, "What can you expect from Soft Jimmy?" If they made him turn the grindstone, he would always turn it from the man sharpening his tools: if the grinder changed sides, so did Jimmy; he never would turn it the right way. One day he found a sixpence, and a man who saw him pick it up, said, "I 've lost one." "But had yours a hole in it?" said Jimmy, looking at the sixpence in his hand. "Yes," answered the man at a

venture. "Then mine has not," said Soft Jimmy, chuckling with delight. But Jimmy was once taken in. He was too fond of cold gin-and-water, and one day asked a farmer to treat him. "If you 'll go home with me," said the farmer, "I 'll give you as much as you can drink, Jimmy." Soft Jimmy ran for a mile or two beside the farmer's horse; and when they reached the farm-house, the farmer called for a pail of water, into which he poured a small glass of gin, telling Jimmy, when he had finished that he should have another. "He was too sharp for me that time," said Jimmy. But Soft Jimmy took the farmer in afterwards. He was asked to run an errand, and the reward was to be as much bread and cheese as he could eat. Jimmy carried off the remainder of the cheese and the large brown loaf; saying, no time was mentioned, and if he could not eat it all that day, he could the next. The good-natured farmer laughed, and, in consideration of the trick he had played him, let Jimmy off with the plunder. Poor fellow! although he but aped softness, and pretended not to be right sharp, that he might live in laziness, yet he became a senseless idiot at last, and died in the true character which he had so long assumed;—a warning which ought not to be lost upon us. Were I writing a maudlin book, I might make a long sermon on the fate of Soft Jimmy; but I trust I am writing for fine manly-hearted boys, who, if they assume any thing at all, it will be a character of noble manliness—a something beyond, rather than behind, their capabilities.

Pleasant, too, was sheep washing and sheep shearing time; such a dreamy bleating beside the brooks and about the barns, as the sheep and lambs answered each other from the wattled fences in which they were confined to keep them separate;—rare fun was it for us to pull and drag at some great, fat, heavy sheep, and drawing it towards the water's edge shove it in, and perhaps ourselves with it, while the sheep washer stood

Engraved and Printed in Colours by Vizetelly Brothers and Co.

SUMMER:—SHEEPWASHING.

ready to souse the moving mass of wool head over ears. To see how he seized the sheep by the saturated wool, gave it a push, and sent it along swimming to the next washer, who, having given it a second immersion, sent it swimming onwards towards the third; and he, after a finishing plunge, left it to find its way to its bleating and dripping companions, who, congregated together on the adjacent bank, seemed complaining to each other of the ill-usage they had undergone. Many a tug and pull have we had at those sturdy sheep, our hands oily through dragging at their hot fleeces, as we compelled them to undergo a thorough washing; and reasoning with them in our way, as Shakspere's Lance did to his dog, "Come along with you," we used to say, "you great, big, woolly brute; I'm sure you must almost be sweltered to death in that close, thick, oily fleece; surely you can't grumble at being washed once a year, to make you clean, and sweet, and decent; how ever you can stand in the summer sunshine with all that wool on you I don't know; I'm sure if I was wrapped in such a hot, shaggy coat, such weather as this, I should swale away like a candle in an oven on baking day. Come along with you, and don't stand there making such a noise as that, you'll feel as comfortable again after you've had a ducking or two in the brook; and as for your wool, why you'll look as if you'd got a new suit on, or eaten nothing all the summer but snow-white daisies and May blossoms."

But kind words had no effect upon them, so we were compelled to follow the example of our excellent schoolmaster, who, when he found that persuasion and forbearance wouldn't do at all, had recourse to what seldom or never failed, and that was a little rude, downright force. The washing once over, and the sheep having staid a few days just to let the wool regain its old, oily elasticity, so that, as the clippers say, they may shear all the softer, then the great summer sheep shearing began in earnest. The huge, high, heavy, ponderous barn doors were

taken off their hinges, and placed on strong, low tressels, or heavy logs of wood, to elevate the doors to a convenient height, and on these ample tables the sunbrowned shearers clipped the bleating sheep. Oh! it was famous fun to see them clipping away one against the other, and striving who could get done first—to roll up the fleeces and carry them into the barn, until we raised up quite a stack of wool—then to have a swing suspended from the great high rafters of the barn, and go such a height, ah! that was swinging indeed—then to roll all amongst the wool—to fetch the sheep up to the shearers—to turn them loose again after they were clipped, and watch how the lambs were puzzled to pick out their dams from the flock which had been shorn; you would have liked to have been there, amid all that bleating of sheep, and barking of dogs, and such racing as we had after the sheep that ran away; it was prime sport, I can tell you. But the best of all was the sheep-shearing feast —such bowls of furmenty stuffed full of currants, as you never before saw in your life, and chines of beef seasoned with all kinds of nice herbs, which are only known to old-fashioned country people; great horns of ale, and glorious plum-puddings, almost as much as a boy could lift. Then, it was so pleasant to remember that these sheep-shearing feasts are hundreds and hundreds of years old, and that we read all about them in the Holy Bible, and what Nabal's wife, who lived in Carmel, sent to King David when she kept up her sheep-shearing feast. There are many good old customs still existing in England, as we shall show before we have written all we intend to write about the four seasons of the year.

But the village feast has brought to my mind old Abraham Axby, a fine, tall, straight, silver-haired old soldier, who had fought in several engagements, and returned to his native village in his old age, to enjoy a comfortable pension. It has, I fear, been the lot of but few boys to have a companion and friend like this honourable old English soldier. Although

sixty years of age, he was as much a boy at heart as the youngest of us; and in the summer season his greatest delight was to take some refreshment in a basket, a bottle of ale, his tinder box, pipe, and tobacco, and spend the live-long day in rambling far away from house and home, amongst the hills and woods. Many and many a day have I been his only companion. Oh, what a delicious gipsy-like kind of a life it was! and he was acquainted with almost every tree that grew; every wild flower, or nearly, that blowed; knew a bird by its note, and could tell by their song whether they had young ones or not. What have we not seen in those great forest-like woods, in a summer's day? Warton Wood, which was five miles wide and seven miles long; where we have started a polecat, that has been devouring a rabbit; chased young foxes into their holes; seen weasels, and snakes, and otters, by the brook; water-rats and efts, and dark venomous vipers; toads, so black, and such a size; ravens with great horny beaks and owls horrible to look upon; with hawks almost as big as eagles; and, above all, a large tree with ten herons' nests on it. Then that old soldier was so brave, that I do not believe he would have run away, no, not if even a wolf had made its appearance. A wolf! why he had seen wolves abroad, had heard them howl around the camp through the long dark night, which closed over the hard-fought battle-field. Oh! what marvels he used to recount, as he sat on the root of some antique oak, smoking his pipe, and narrating his hair-breadth escapes in flood and field.

The great green solitudes of the woods seemed to have a strange charm for the brave old veteran; he loved to hear the cooing of the ring-dove, the dreamy rustling of the long leaves, and the murmur of the woodland brook; and sometimes I have seen him steal away, while he thought the tall underwood would conceal him from my view, and there I have noticed him, unobserved, kneeling down on the velvet moss

to pray. Since those days I have often thought, that perchance the old soldier had slain some brother-man in battle, and that his conscience had accused him of the deed, and he found it hard to reconcile his duty to his country with his duty to God, who has so solemnly forbidden the shedding of human blood. Such thoughts passed not through my mind whilst I was but a boy, but they have done many a time since then. My acquaintance with that old soldier was the means of my knowing hundreds of things, which are to be found in the country, which I might not but for him have understood. He talked, and I gladly listened; and he had at home many a good old-fashioned Herbal, and many a volume of Natural History, the plates of which he taught me to copy; thus rendering out-of-door objects familiar to my sight before I had attained my twelfth year. I knew wood-betony from the dead-nettle; could tell agrimony though I stood yards off, and knew how to make it into "tea," a common beverage even to this hour amongst country-people. Oh what bundles of herbs we used to gather! if they possessed but half the virtues attributed to them by the grey-haired veteran, mankind would have but little need of doctors. Then he was so clever at "liming" sticks for birds; could catch the old one whenever he wished, to carry it home along with the young ones: and as for moles, if he once stuck a stick and a string in the ground, next morning the "mouldiwarp," as he called it, was almost sure to be there.

Then he knew such a deal about England, hundreds of years ago, and old English forests, when they abounded with wolves, and wild boars, and great stags, which kings hunted, and Robin Hood chased; would tell me, if we had been found in those forests in former days, how we should have been outlawed and proclaimed, and dragged before the court of Eyre, and the claws cut off our dog's feet, and even hung, if we had shot a stag which the king had proclaimed free. It was only in after days, when I had read Manwood's History of

Forest Laws, that I found all these marvellous things to be true. He told me how, in that age, men were imprisoned for trespassing on the forest boundary, although there was no mark to tell them where the forest-line began nor where it ended; perhaps a mill stood here, and a mile or two further off a great oak tree; and there was not even a footpath to tell you when you stepped within the forbidden mark, as you traversed the immense space betwixt the two objects. It seemed as if the Verdurers, or Agistors (for such names were the gamekeepers called in those days), could imprison you whenever they pleased. And right glad was I to find, in the old ballads, how Robin Hood and his merry men rose up, and, in defiance of these cruel laws, slaughtered the deer, and opposed the proud Normans, and preferred leading a wild life in the forests to eating the bread of slavery under such stern task-masters. And you would not believe how the poor were ground down, and what they had to endure, and how they could find no redress for the wrongs inflicted upon them by the rich, unless you were to read some good History of England which treats of the manners and customs of that period.

Oh, what a great change has England undergone since Abraham Axby lived! Steam-boats were talked of then as wonderful things, which would go against the tide without sails, or without losing much ground. Railways were undreamed of, except the common tram-ways at the collieries, sent down an inclined plain, and drawn up by an engine stationary on the hill, and a strong rope. The market-boat, hauled by a horse, or two men, travelled at the rate of two miles and a half in the hour. To hear from America, was indeed tidings from an invisible world; while India laid far away under the sun, a burning-hot far-off country, from whence, we believed in those days, no traveller returned. But now there is scarcely a boy amongst you who has not heard of railway trains running at the rate of fifty miles an hour; of steamers crossing the Atlantic

Ocean in sixteen days; and of letters coming from India to England within the space of a month: while I, who boasted at twelve of knowing wood-betony and agrimony, should be puzzled with the first lesson a mere child, who is learning botany, masters in its earliest exercise.

And during my rambles with the old soldier, we used to see weasels, and stoats, and martens, which build their nests in holes in banks, or in the hollow places of trees; and kill hares and rabbits, catch birds, and destroy their eggs, plunder hen roosts, and think nothing of putting a large turkey to death in an instant! Oh! they are a destructive race of little savages are these; and one has been known, before now, to attack a child in its cradle, and inflict a deep wound upon its neck, where it clung, and sucked like a leech—for they are fond of blood, and to obtain this, they will sometimes destroy a whole hen-roost, not caring to feed upon the bodies of the poultry which they have killed. Some of these are red, some brown;[1] and they are said to change their colour in the winter. They will climb trees, attack the old bird on its nest, suck the eggs, or carry off the young, for nothing seems to come amiss to them. They are also great hunters after and destroyers of mice, and their long slender bodies are well adapted to follow these destructive little animals through their runs in corn-stacks; thus rendering the farmer good service occasionally, although they never ask him to reward them with a duck or a chicken, but, whenever they see a chance, help themselves without his consent. Oh! if you could but see one attack a mouse!—just one single bite of the head, which is done in a moment, and which pierces the brain, and before you can say "Jack Robinson," the mouse is as dead as a red-herring, for it has neither time to squeak nor struggle. It is no joke, I can tell you, to be bitten by a weasel; and if you thought, when you caught hold of him by the back, you had him safe, you would soon find your mistake out, for his neck is as pliable as india-rubber, and he would

have hold of your hand in a moment. What think you of a great sharp-beaked

HAWK POUNCING UPON A WEASEL,

and flying up with him into the air to carry him off to his nest, thinking to himself, no doubt, "I 've caught you at last, my young gentleman; you 've eaten many a bird in your day, but I 'll eat you now." "Thank you for nothing," said the weasel, as he rode, not very comfortably, between the claws of the hawk; "two can play at that game, Mr. Hawk; and if you mean feasting on me, I do n't see why I should n't

have a taste of you;" so he twisted round his elastic neck, poked up his pointed nose, and in he went, with his sharp teeth, right under the wings of the hawk, making such a hole in an instant, that you might have thrust your finger in. The hawk tried to pick at him with his hooked beak, but it was no use, the weasel kept eating away, and licking his lips as if he enjoyed himself; and the hawk soon came wheeling down to the ground, which he no sooner touched, than away ran the weasel, with his belly full, and not a bit the worse for the ride; while Mr. Hawk lay there as dead as a nail. Was n't the biter nicely bit! And what I 've told you is quite true, and was witnessed by a gentleman, at Bloxworth, in Dorsetshire. Only let a dog come near its nest, and see what the weasel will do if it 's got young ones. Out it will rush, and fasten on the dog's nose in an instant, and there it will hang, although it is such a little thing, not above seven or eight inches long.

Nor is the weasel the only courageous creature of this species, for when a

STOAT

once gets hold of a hare, it 's all over with him, I can tell you; it 's no use the hare running off, for wherever he goes,

there the stoat is hanging at his throat, and the hare seems to know well enough it 's all up with him, so hops off for a few yards, and then gives it up for a bad job. There is n't a bolder little beast of its size in England than the stoat. If the prey it is pursuing takes to the water, after him goes the stoat, for it can swim like a water-rat; and if even it loses sight of the game it is in pursuit of, it can still follow it by the scent. What would you think of a great ugly fellow coming into your house, some cold winter's morning, eating you up, and then taking possession of it as if it was his own? This is the way the brute of a stoat sometimes serves the poor blind mole; he walks into his house, without either making him a bow, or saying, "How do you do?" eats up the poor mole for breakfast, then creeps into its nest, and has a comfortable nap, as if he 'd a right to it. I wonder how he would like a good wire-haired terrier to serve him the same trick; and you may depend upon it, were one only to catch him, he would, and, although it would be very cruel, I could n't feel much sorrow for the stoat after all.

One amongst the many of our boyish haunts was the Old Hall, a large, desolate building, which it was our delight to ramble over. Through the centre, and under the middle of the wings, spanned great gloomy archways; and dark ruined staircases went winding up into turrets, and into huge mouldering rooms, which, when we shouted, sent back strange echoes that would have turned the cheek of a timid boy pale only to have heard them. In and out were grim carved heads, monsters whose living likeness never moved upon earth, with eyes on each side of their mouths, and arms growing out of their cheeks, all cut in grey old granite, and looking terrible when the shadows of evening settled down upon them, or the moonlight streamed down in streaks of white, making lighter the portions it fell upon, or steeping the shadows in blacker hues. A desolate and silent awe hung about the place

when you entered it; it seemed like treading the dominions of the dead. All around told of an age which had departed. Above were banqueting rooms, and wide passages, and deep bay-windows, which had been trod by many an armed baron in the days of yore. Below were dungeons, dark and deep and cold and dismal; and as you walked over the floors above, the echoing sound of your footsteps fell low and lonely and melancholy, and made you feel sad and thoughtful without knowing why. In some ruinous oriel, far beyond our reach, the sun still glittered on remnants of painted glass, the head of a saint, or a serpent; gaudy hues of gold, and purple, and crimson, reflected for a moment on the dark oaken floor, or the blackened and ruinous wall. And a thousand old traditions hung about the place, of maidens who have been shut up and imprisoned in those dizzy turrets; of warriors who have been chained to the walls of those damp dungeons, in which rusty helmets, and coats of mail, and dead men's bones, have been found; then there were subterraneous passages, such as may be seen even in this day at Eltham Palace, entered by secret doors, which went deep and dark under ground below the moat, and into what once had been the ancient garden beyond. And while wandering over this solemn and ruinous place, many a scene rose before us which we had read of in the history of our country, and many a form seemed to pass by whose shadow darkens the annals of England; for, during the wars of the Roses, it had stood a stormy siege, and every yard of ground that stood about it, had been contested inch by inch. The invader's trumpet had rung through those gloomy gateways; archers had shot from the narrow loop-holes of those turrets; crossbow-men had manned those battlements; the drawbridge, which had crumbled into ruins ages ago, had been lowered from that sally-port; and across that moat had the mailed ranks rushed, with sword and battle-axe, struggling foot to foot, and hand to hand, until driven back again by the

invaders, when the sharp-toothed and grated portcullis dropped amid the thunder of its grating and grinding chains. We seemed, while wandering through those ruins, to be living amongst the Plantagenets and the Tudors, when the business of life was divided into battles and bloodshed, to hunting the deer in the broad unbounded forests, the chanting of matin and vesper, and the processions of solemn monks through the long aisles of old cathedrals. Every hall, every chamber, and every turret, had its legend; and in one of the latter tradition had laid the scene of a tragical story, which had been handed down from sire to son through many generations, and which they believed to be as true as that the grey old turret itself was still in existence. In that old hall John of Gaunt had once resided; his armorial bearings are yet carven in a dozen places. His daughter had been carried off by a young knight, who lived in a neighbouring castle, the foundations of which alone are now visible. She was pursued and overtaken before she had reached the stronghold of her lover, brought back by her father, and by him imprisoned in the central turret. A few hours after, the old castle was besieged by a troop of horsemen: John of Gaunt and his followers were compelled to flee, and leave the fortress in the hands of the invaders. Amid the struggle the prisoner in the turret was forgotten. Days passed away, and the conquerors, unconscious of her presence, left her unknowingly to perish: nor was it until her father had returned with a strong reinforcement, and again driven the besiegers from his stronghold, that her fate became known. You may readily imagine the effect that a visit to the top of that tower had on us, imaginative boys. We used to wonder to ourselves in which corner she was found dead; how her father looked, and what he said, when he burst open the door of the tower; whether there was nothing in the apartment by which she might have clambered up to those loop-holes, and made her wants known. These and a hundred similar

thoughts used to cross our minds whenever we visited that spot. Although we made sad havoc of history, confusing dates and periods, mingling all sorts of arms and architecture together, making crusaders of the Saxons, and putting the Normans in battle against the Danes; still these very errors were of use in after days, compelling us to look more narrowly into the written annals of our country, and causing us to become better acquainted with the events which really had occurred amidst such scenes and ruins as these.

The very act of climbing up those dark, winding, and wandering staircases, required no small courage; and no boy who was in heart a coward would have dared to have hidden himself alone when we played at "Hide and Seek," in that great rambling and deserted building. Not that there is any thing to fear in such places—no more than there is in one's own home, unless it is to slip through some hole; although foolish old nurses will tell you all sorts of tales, about ghosts, and spirits, and such like nonsense, all of which are false stories, and which you will laugh at as you grow older. True enough, we used to frighten one another sometimes, by concealing ourselves, and making all kinds of awful noises; and one night I remember two of us hiding in one of the turrets, and seeing, amid the darkness, a pair of great eyes fixed upon us, then there was a flapping of wings, a loud "too-whoo, too-whoo, tu-whit, tu-woo-woo," and out of the ruined window sailed a great grey owl. Owls, and a few bats and jackdaws, were the only ghosts we ever met with in that desolate mansion; and we dare say that if all the stories which are told could be proved, such as these would be found to make up the bulk of spirits which are said to "haunt the night," and would turn out to be all fables and falsehoods.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" That hath ever seemed to us the oldest of all summer-sounds. "Cuckoo—Cuckoo" it still sings as it alights upon the silver-stemmed birch, the colour of whose bark

matches the sober hue of the bird's plumage. Who, unless they knew, would credit that such a little red mouth could make itself heard for a full mile round? Strange things do they tell of that noisy ash-coloured bird, with its black and white tail, of laying its eggs in the nests of other birds, and that even the young of

THE CUCKOO.

when hatched (a fearless usurper, like its parent, of all rights), will throw out the naked brood amid which it has been nursed. One naturalist has recorded, from his own observation, that he saw a cuckoo's egg in a hedge-sparrow's nest, and that in a short time a young cuckoo and two sparrows were hatched, which he saw in the nest together; that in the evening of the same day the two young hedge-sparrows were excluded, and the cuckoo the sole occupant of their house. This the cuckoo accomplishes by working itself to the very bottom of the nest, until feeling one of the young ones on its back, it then, by a sudden jerk, throws out the callow brood upon the ground. That the cuckoo returns again, and feeds and rears its young, is the

opinion of many, although we believe that it is left to the mercy of the stranger-bird whose young it has destroyed. I well remember once seeing a cuckoo attack the nests of several swallows, in an old town in Lincolnshire. The song of a cuckoo heard ringing in a market-place, could not fail of drawing the attention of many of the inhabitants. It flew from nest to nest, pursued by the whole congregation of swallows, who seemed determined to wage war against this common enemy; and after several fruitless attempts to deposit its egg in the nests of the swallows, the cuckoo, pursued by the whole colony for some distance, at length flew across the river, and was lost amid the distant scenery. I have often wished that it had succeeded in leaving its egg behind in any one of the swallows' nests, in order that I might have had proof whether it returned to feed and rear its young.

But see what a beautiful scene is this stretching beside the village and beyond the river! What a picturesque appearance has that row of stately elms which overhang the footpath along the bank! What a noble sweep the river takes at the foot of those hills, below which it curves its silver arm, then dwindles away in the perspective, and is lost amid the wooded distance! Here sheep bleat, and jingle their musical bells as they crop the wild thyme from the bee-haunted hillocks, or browse among the luxuriant clover in the neighbouring pastures. Knee deep, the plump-sided oxen graze, or chewing the cud, lie half buried among the flowers of summer. The heavy wagon with its grey tilt, rumbles slowly along up the steep acclivity, on whose summit stands the old mill, its rent sails turning round with a lazy motion, as if half hesitating whether it should stand still or move. Here and there we see figures crossing the landscape, the angler with his wicker basket borne on the butt end of the fishing rod which rests upon his shoulder, moving leisurely along the bank, or pausing every now and then, as if selecting some favourite spot for the

morrow's sport. The woodman, in his forest-stained dress, followed by his faithful dog, and bearing the bundle of fagots upon his back, which he will add to the great pile already reared up beside his hut, and stored to meet the yet distant winter. You hear the song of the milkmaid, and can just see the white kit which she balances on her head, beside the long hedgerow by which she is passing. The red cow which she has left in the meadow stands lowing beside the gate; a calm beauty hangs about the deep blue of the heavens, while the earth is steeped in the golden splendour of an unclouded sunshine. The breeze scarcely awakens a ripple upon the river, more than is made by the swallow when she stoops down and laves her breast as she flies. The willows beside the bank bend with a gentle and dreamy motion, as if composing their feathery heads to sleep; and the little ripples creep so feebly upon the shore, that they scarcely rock the slender reeds which skirt the lowest slope of the water-course. The whole scene is broken into beautiful little pictures, every one of which a good artist might transfer to canvas, and hang his studio with a hundred morsels of landscape.

What a blessing it is to be born in a country like England, where green hills tower, wild woods wave, and clear rivers flow through hundreds of miles of sweet pastoral scenery—where men dare give utterance to their thoughts, and no one, unless he is mean enough to do so, need become the slave of opinion—where oppression and wrong are dragged forth into the light of day, and no matter how high may be the rank, or great the wealth of the offender, they cannot protect him from public censure—where talent can take its proud stand beside title, and the highest offices in the realm have been obtained by men who had no renowned ancestry to boast of. These things ought to make every English boy feel proud of his country; not for its conquests abroad, but the great moral changes which have been wrought by the lovers of peace, who

have done their duty at home. It is my task to draw your attention to peaceful England, to its rural homesteads and green secluded places, not to what is misnamed its glorious victories and splendid conquests; for, however stirring may be the accounts of the many great battles we have won, you must ever bear in mind that such painful triumphs were purchased by leaving many a poor child fatherless, and many a fond mother a widow; that the sound of the trumpet, the neighing of the war-horse, and the thundering roll of artillery, were accompanied with the groans and heart-rending shrieks of dying men—some left all night to bleed to death on the battle-field, others speechless and perishing for want of water, and writhing in agony, crushed by wheels and the hoofs of horses, which, during the retreat or pursuit, had passed over them. Such are the miseries by which great victories are won. Remember, that to cultivate the arts of peace, to instruct and enlighten and better the morals and circumstances of your fellow-men, is to win the admiration of the truly good; that war, even in a just cause, is a dreadful scourge and a fearful evil; and he who endeavours to unite nation to nation in a common brotherhood, will be able to look death in the face more boldly than the bravest warrior that ever shed human blood. A courageous heart never covets a quarrel, but is ever ready when danger appears; a brave man would die in the defence of his children, in protecting his own home; and he would also sooner die than destroy the home of another who had done him no injury. War would soon cease, if those who love it were left to fight it out amongst themselves.

See where that volume of smoke rises above the faded gold of the furze-bushes, twisting and coiling its spiral column of intense blue through the wide-spreading and forked branches of the ancient oak, like a cloud that has lost its way, and is struggling to regain its place again in the floating marble of heaven. Saw ye that little ragged boy, whose face is the

colour of a ripe hazel nut, peep out from beneath the underwood? Depend upon it we are nearing the neighbourhood of

A GIPSY ENCAMPMENT,

and it was the smoke of their camp-fire which we saw in the distance, blending so beautifully with the foliage of the old oak. It seems to have been washing-day with them. I wonder what a London laundress would think of the colour of their linen! and yet where in the world could we find a sweeter drying-ground than the corner of this wide wood? or wish for better air than blows across the broad and open common? Into what a number of little pictures the foreground of the forest is broken!—children playing at "Hide-and-Seek" among the fan-like leaves of the fern, and behind the prickly gorse-bushes—donkeys turned loose, and grazing here and there, free to choose their pasturage wherever they please—masses of yellow and white drapery hung out to dry, and fluttering from every bush around the encampment—here a dog half asleep, and there a sun-burnt gipsy, leaning on his elbow and side, and while he

smokes his pipe, watching the old woman in the red cloak, who is attending to the contents which simmer in the large iron pot suspended from three stakes above the fragrant wood-fire. Even the grey blankets which form the arched roofs of their low tents, stand out in rich contrast beside the wide underwood, and the deep background of trees; beyond which the eye falls upon interminable vistas of forest scenery. There is scarcely a linnet's nest in that wide range of furze and fern undiscovered by those ragged gipsy boys; and whenever they have heard the ring-dove coo in the wood, they have set out and looked up almost every tall tree, to see if they could not descry the two white eggs shining through the lattice-like floor of its open nest; and when once they saw a bird, if there was no stone at hand, they would throw up the first heavy clod or dry stick they came near, with so sure an aim, that unless the feathered chorister took to its wings, it was almost certain of being brought to the ground. A wild, lawless, and merry life do these gipsies lead; sheltering, wherever they can, in the towns in winter, and in summer time establishing their residence by the side of a wood, at the corner of a common, or in the picturesque nook of some desolate heath,—taking care, however, never to be beyond the sound of the cock crow of some neighbouring village. Many a silly country maiden parts with her hard-earned shilling that she may have her fortune told by the swarthy and keen-eyed gipsy, who slily pockets the money and afterwards laughs at her folly, trying hard at the same time to beg the very gown off the country girl's back. They would promise that either you or I should one day inherit an estate worth ten thousand a year, were we only to give them sixpence, and allow them to examine the lines on the palm of the hand; and when they returned to their camp, they would show the silver coin, and exclaim, "Fools and their money are soon parted." And yet there are many so foolish as to believe that the gipsies can tell their fortunes, and well do they deserve

to lose their money and be laughed at for being such simpletons.

Although, as I have before said, spring is the season when birds build, and when we shall have so much to say about their nests; yet I am sure you will be pleased with what I shall tell you about the Bottle-tit, or, as we used to call it, the Pudding-poke, a name no doubt derived from the peculiar form of its nest. What think you to its laying from twelve to twenty eggs, each of which is not larger than a horse-bean? I remember myself taking a nest in Park-house Lane, near Gainsborough, which contained fifteen beautiful white and spotted eggs; a number that, if weighed, would be nearly twice the weight of the bird. You would be delighted to watch a regiment of these little fellows marching up a tree, they seem to be playing the game of "Follow my Leader;" and there is no harm in believing that birds have their games as well as boys. Away goes one little tit up a branch, followed by a whole string of tits, and as he runs along, he keeps crying, "Twit, twit, twit!" and I have no doubt he means to say, "Now, my little bottle-tits, come along, don't be frightened, if you slip you have only to open your wings and you are safe; a little higher, my dears, up under that broad roof of leaves, right over this nice soft moss. Oh la! it is rather too dark here, and the leaves are so close together that I cannot see the sunshine through them; a little higher, my dears."—"Twit, twit," they answer —"A little exercise will do us no harm this fine morning. Is n't this a nice spot? but, oh dear! there are so many of you behind that I must keep moving to make room for you, and really I think it 's more pleasant at the top than it is here; we shall have such a beautiful prospect on the topmost branches, and there will be plenty of room for us there you know; and then I can look round upon you, and pay my respects to you all." "Twit, twit," say they; and up they go to the very summit, amongst the sunshine and the glittering

leaves; and when they are too warm, they come hopping down again, and then as if they did not know their own minds for a minute together, away they start, with a "twit, twit, twit," for the top again; and so they play with one another all day long.

And this little bird builds such a curious nest—supposing you doubled both your hands, and placed them one above another, and could make them perfectly round, well, that would be about the shape and size of a nest; and if you opened one finger to make a hole at the side, that would be like the place in which the pudding-poke enters its nest. But I cannot make you understand how beautifully and curiously it is woven together; first it takes a soft green moss, then speckles it outside with that rich flaky stuff which you see on the stems of trees or old railings, and which are called lichen, or livewort, though boys would call it rough white moss; then it takes the egg-nests of spiders, and these are drawn out and imbedded amongst the wool, looking, when you stretch the nest, like ropy-bread in hot weather. Well, when all this is done, she covers it over at the top to keep out the wet, and uses such moss as comes nearest in colour to the branches amid which it is built: then comes a beautiful lining of soft small feathers, which, if taken out and spread upon a table, would astonish you; you would scarcely credit that so large a quantity could be compressed into so small a compass. If as many young ones are hatched as there are eggs, I cannot tell how the old birds can get to feed them; one would fancy that they must lie one on the top of the other, like a swarm of bees when they alight; and that in hot weather, and in so warm a retreat, there must, we imagine, be many deaths in so large a family from suffocation alone. I forgot to tell you that this is one of the least of British birds, the golden-crested wren being the only one known that is smaller. Oh how little do we know of the habits and customs of the birds and animals which we are accustomed to see almost every day—how little of

His wisdom who suffereth not a sparrow to fall to the ground unheeded! The dispensations of an all-wise Providence are as yet a mystery to man. Naturalists may study and write, and the more they learn, the more they find to marvel at: the paths of knowledge seem to lead only nearer unto God, and the clearer our understanding, the greater is our astonishment at the wonders wrought by His own Almighty Hand.

But our ramble round the wood, and from the gipsy-camp, has again brought us beside the river, though at a point which we have not before visited. The corner of that shelving bank, which partly fronts the wooden-bridge, and overhangs the mouth of the deep water-course, by which the wide marshes are drained, was for several years haunted by a large

OTTER.

Many a time, concealed behind the rushes, have I watched its motions in the water, as it swam about on the surface, or dived beneath in pursuit of fish. Beautiful were its actions, stemming the current, or gliding down with the stream—for of all swimmers, its attitude is perhaps the most elegant. It was wonderful to watch how suddenly it would leave off its

play, disappear under the water in an instant the moment it saw a fish gliding beneath, and rise again, after it had caught it, at a considerable distance from the spot where it first dived. Beautiful must its motions have been beneath the water, could we but have seen it shooting to and fro, up and down, in every direction: now against the current, then off like an arrow with the stream, just as the fish darted about and endeavoured in vain to escape. Then to watch it bearing its prey to the shore, and holding the fish in its paws, when it would begin at the head, and eat its way downward, until only the tail of the fish was left. Many a chase had we after him, with our dogs; and fine sport it was when he took to the water, and baffled his pursuers by diving; sometimes keeping under until their patience was exhausted, or rising unawares, at the most unexpected spot, to breathe; and more than one unfortunate dog has he dragged with him under the water, and would speedily have drowned it, had not the alarmed brute loosed his hold while under, and swam, half breathless, to the shore. It is stated that the otter will sometimes drive a whole shoal of fish before it, circling round them as he swims, until, finding that they cannot escape, they will throw themselves out of the water upon the shore. The form of the otter is well adapted for swimming, with its long flattened body and broad tail, by which it steers itself as with a rudder, while its legs are short, and capable of being turned every way; and in addition to all these admirable qualifications for swimming, it is also web footed. Its head is broad and flat; its upper lip thick, with the eyes placed very near the nostrils; its colour is a dim whitish grey varying into brownish tints underneath. There are numerous instances on record of this animal having been tamed, and taught to catch and bring home fish. What boy would not like to have a tame otter? which he might teach to fetch and carry the same as a dog does. What an agreeable companion one would be to ramble with by a river side; to

see him plunge in head foremost every now and then, and bring out a large fish between his teeth, lay it at your feet, and start off again until he had provided enough for a family dinner? Would it not be a treat, when rambling some fine morning between the slope of the river and the shelving bank, to discover an otter's nest, with three or four young ones, lying snugly among the grass and reeds in some hole, or under the hollow roots of a tree; to bring them home, and feed them at first with small fish, then by degrees diet them on bread and milk; and oh, what a proud day it would be when they had grown big enough, to give them names, and to see each one come as it was called; to take them out for a run on the river bank; to see them rush into the water head over ears, one after the other, and each to return with a fine fish in its teeth? This would be something to talk about; and what boy would not be proud to become the possessor of a little pack of otters?

But lest I should weary you with too many descriptions of birds and animals, and trees and flowers, and other country scenes, I will tell you about a poor boy whom I knew; and who, having lost his parents, set about providing for himself, and by his own exertions obtained a livelihood. After his father and mother died, he got a situation under a fishmonger, where he was employed to carry home the fish purchased by customers. But this was only for a short time, until the boy whom he had succeeded recovered from illness. He had, however, given such satisfaction to his employer by his industry and attention, that the fishmonger lent him a basket, and allowing him a profit of a penny or two on each pair of soles, or whatever fish he might sell, thus gave him a chance of doing the best he could for himself. By great care and perseverance he soon became master of a few shillings, and now began to speculate, buying at times a whole fish of his employer, and running the risk of selling it. And now you

might see him sometimes set off in a morning with a whole cod-fish or a whole salmon in his basket, together with his large knife and scales, and as ready to cut six ounces as six pounds, to accommodate his customers; and thus he would come and go several times in a day, sometimes getting rid of two or three large fish. By degrees, his customers began to tell him overnight what they should like for the next day; and, as he found his old master occasionally supplying him with very indifferent fish, he began to think whether he could not find a better market, and so deal at the first hand. This he named to several of his friends, and at last it reached the ears of a captain belonging to one of the steamers, who told him that he would give him a run and back to Hull for nothing when he liked; and that, when there, he might purchase at the best market; and more than this, he lent little Bob a sovereign. "Poor lad!" said he, "he never eat a crust but what he earned since his parents died, and he ought to be encouraged." The next day saw Bob a regular fishmonger. One neighbour lent him an old white deal table, to place his stock upon; another, a wash-tub, in which to keep his clean water: and there, at the end of the court in which he was born, in the wide open street, along which scores of passengers passed every hour, did Bob open his new establishment. A proud day was it for him, I can tell you! Oh! you should have seen him with his little blue apron on, and his cold red hands, wielding his long sharp knife, and scraping some fresh silver-looking fish with the edge of it, or wiping another down gently with his clean cloth, as he pointed out to his customers the freshness of this, the plumpness of that, the bright eyes of a third, the red gills of a fourth; then adding with pride, "I bought them out of the fishing-boats myself, just as they came in, an hour or two after they 'd been caught!" Before night he sold every fish. Not an ounce was left; and his customers declared that what they had purchased was much fresher and

sweeter than they had ever had of his old master. After a few more trips to Hull, he attracted the attention of a fisherman whom he had several times dealt with, and who, having a large family of his own, said, "Thee beest but a little 'un to begin for theysen; and, between thee and me and the captain, I think I might manage to look thee out a little lot every morning, and send them down by the first steam-boat, so that thou'd have 'em fresh and nice; and soe save thee all this hallacksing and trapassing up and down, which I see no mander o' use in; and it would do thee a deal o' good, lad, and me no harm. Captain would be good enough to bring the money back;"—and so it was arranged; and every morning, regularly as the day came, there was little Bob to be seen on the steam-packet wharf, with the truck he had borrowed, and plenty of good-natured sailors ready to help him ashore with his hamper of fish; for he was such a little one, and had neither father nor mother, that almost anybody would assist him without being asked. And now the deal white table was found too little, and he had to borrow another. Then a butcher, who had given up standing in the market, said; "He had got an old stall he could sell him cheap;—true, one of the tressels wanted a leg, and the front pole was missing; but old Hack, the joiner, would put that to rights for a shilling; and the price of the stall would be—why—some morning when he happened to have in a stock of fish, he might send him a 'boiling' for dinner." So Bob agreed, and the captain of the steamer had an old sail, which he said "was about worn out;—true, there was a hole or two in it, but he might give old Betty Buttery a bit of fish to set a patch or two on, and it would make a capital tilt for his stall, to keep the sun off his fish." And so Bob got on, bit by bit, step by step, from a stall to a shop; from bowling a truck, to keeping a cart, a horse, and a man, until at last he became the first fishmonger in the town, and had to supply his old master at the wholesale prices.

This shows what may be done by industry, perseverance, and honesty; for an idle boy would never have striven for a livelihood like little Bob the Fishmonger.

I will now tell you about a strange bird, called

THE GREBE,

or Dabchick, for I wish to make you acquainted with many things that you could not comprehend, were you only to read dry hard books on Natural History, such as are filled with learned phrases, that only men who have dedicated a whole life to the study of, can clearly understand. The nest of this curious bird, has long been a subject of dispute amongst naturalists; many of whom, I strongly suspect, never saw it. But first I must describe the wild spot where the Grebe was in the habit of building, a spot which will interest you all the more

through knowing that it formed a subject of dispute between Hotspur and Glendower, in the first part of Shakspere's "King Henry the Fourth," act iii. scene 1. You must know then that in Shakspere's time the river Trent, which divides the counties of Nottingham and Lincoln, made a large circle of four or five miles, which Shakspere calls "a huge half-moon," though it is not so, but bears a greater resemblance to a ring with a small piece out, and that small piece, which we will suppose to be the sixteenth part, was all the actual progress made either up or down, after having traversed the immense circle of the ring. Well, this large circular portion of the river, which was navigable in Shakspere's time, has been dry for the last half century, saving where here and there, in the deepest portions of the bed, pools of water still remain. Fancy yourself walking in the bed of a deep river—in a place where, for hundreds and hundreds of years, as far back, no doubt, as the times of the ancient Britons, who there had paddled their wicker boats, along which Dane and Saxon had in succession sailed—fancy what emotions it must have awakened in the mind of an imaginative boy, to have seen the great high banks upheaving on either hand, and to know that he was walking in that great dry channel, where, during the unnumbered years that it was a wide deep rolling river, hundreds had, no doubt, been drowned; to think that ships had sailed over your head; had, perhaps, sunk, and were buried many fathoms deep in the mud beneath your feet; that you walked over the skeletons of fishes, and the buried antiquities of the earliest inhabitants who first navigated this broad English river. A solitary ruined chapel was the only ancient structure which stood upon those waterless banks, and that was in ruins; Time had obliterated every record on those old monuments, and the grey rank grass had grown so tall, that it had fallen down for want of strength to support such an unnatural height. While walking there you might fancy that you were wandering through a silent

world, every trace of whose inhabitants had been swept away, blotted out, and destroyed, like the bright arrowy waters which once shot their rippled silver through the winding expanse of those high piled banks; and now, where the huge sturgeon once swam, and the black-backed porpoise played, where the moon-lit scales of the salmon glittered, and the enormous pike darted upon its prey,—there the bittern boomed, and the tufted plover complained, and the large marsh frog croaked through the deepening twilight,—rushes and reeds, and sword-leaved waterflags, sharp on the edge as a scimitar, overhung with willows and alders, shot up from under every knoll above the deep water-pools, and shadowed every little islet round which the mysterious current coiled, and rolled, above dark unexplored depths, from whose waters the boldest of us shrank back in terror, for into those deep holes we believed the vast mass of the old river-waters had settled, and that they went downward and downward for evermore.

And here it was that the wild grebe built its nest, among reeds and flags and aquatic plants, from which she selected the material for her home, and which were scarcely distinguishable from the wild withered sedge that waved around. The nest was of itself a load almost as much as a boy could well carry, and generally at least a foot thick at the bottom, the strong reeds and rushes which grew around were also bent and woven into it, although the roots were still firm in the ground, so that it was at times impossible to remove the nest, without cutting away the growing flags to which it was attached. At first we were strangely puzzled by one day discovering eggs in the nest, and the next day finding it to all appearance empty. For some time we were deceived, until one day, thrusting our hand into a nest, into which it was difficult to peep, we found the eggs, beneath a thin covering of dry reeds,—whether the bird had done this to conceal them during her absence, or to keep up that warmth which is necessary for hatching the eggs, we must leave to the learned

naturalist to decide. Strange stories are told of this bird sailing away in her nest, and navigating it like a ship, which I cannot for a moment believe; that the nest might be washed away during a heavy rain is likely enough, although secured as I have seen it, by the rushes which grow around, I am more inclined to believe that it would remain submerged in the water. As to its thrusting its feet through, and so paddling along with its nest, the immense size of its foot will prove that it could never force a hole through a substance a foot thick. The eared grebe is a singular looking bird; the bill is black, as also is the head and neck; while a few long yellow feathers extend backwards from the sides of the head; it lays from four to five white eggs, and commonly breeds in the bed of the old river which we have attempted to describe. When alarmed, it will dive under the water, and remain there a long time, with only its bill visible. The water-rat is said to be a great destroyer of its eggs; but those who say so know nothing about the matter, for, as I have told you before, the water-rat lives entirely upon vegetables; whilst diving, however, the bird sometimes falls a prey to the voracious pike.

Hitherto I have told you nothing about the wonderful habits of insects; and were I to communicate to you one quarter of the marvels I have read about, and what I have witnessed during my rambles in the country, I should more than fill my Book of the Seasons with this subject alone. I should not, however, consider that I had done my duty in this work, unless I gave you some account of the Caterpillars; and I shall begin with those, who, almost as soon as they are hatched, roll up a leaf, and make their abode within its folds. You have, no doubt, often when walking in the garden, observed the leaves of the lilac fold together; if you have noticed it at all, you have probably thought that this was caused by the heat, or that the leaf was withering, and about to fall off. Upon a closer observation, however, you will have discovered that

this was not the case, but that the leaf was beautifully rolled back, fold upon fold, as you would roll a sheet of paper; and that to prevent the leaf from springing back to its natural level position, the little architect has prevented it from uncoiling, by fixing a number of silken threads across the leaf. From this little insect springs a very pretty brown-coloured moth. There is another species which takes up its abode in the leaves of the rose-tree or currant-bush: this you will see in every garden; it is known by its dark head and six feet. As if it knew its own weakness, and the strength which summer gives to the sap, and foresaw to what a size the leaves would grow,—it commences its labour in the spring, and begins by rolling up the whole bud in which it is hidden; and then as the summer advances, it has nothing to do but to devour its way from leaf to leaf, until it illustrates an homely proverb, by fairly "eating itself out of house and arbour." Others again, such as frequent willows, and almost every kind of osier, fold the leaves up into a beautiful bundle, which they bind together. Were you to cut the leaves across with a sharp instrument, you would be delighted to see the graceful form into which they are folded. Another class take up their abode in old walls, their food being the moss and lichen which grow thereon; these, enclosed in a box with moss, construct for themselves a beautiful nest; and there is an old wall, surrounding a manor house at Beckenham, near London, in which numbers of these caterpillars have taken up their abode.

There is another kind of caterpillar, which feeds upon the wood of trees, and makes itself a house by eating away the inside of it. This in time turns to the goat-moth, although it is three years in arriving to a perfect state. The only method of becoming acquainted with the manners of these interesting insects is to keep them confined in little boxes with glass doors, and feed them with whatever we first find them upon, if it can be procured. A celebrated naturalist found a red

caterpillar, with a few tufts of hairs on it, feeding on the flowers of the nettle: he placed it in a paper box, and in a few days discovered that it was beginning to prepare its cocoon, which it formed by gnawing pieces of paper from the lid of the box, although it neither lacked the leaves or stalks of nettles amid which it was found. The watchful naturalist, thinking that it might soon eat its way out, and so escape, began to fasten pieces of rumpled paper to the lid of the box by means of a pin, and these the insect soon begun to chop up into such pieces as it needed for the completion of its structure. Four weeks after a beautiful dark coloured moth, mottled with white, made its appearance. Surely to watch such interesting operations as these would be more pleasing to any boy than to destroy the insects.

There is another curious race of insects well-known to fishermen, which build their habitations under the water, and which they form of stones, shells, sand, or wood, all strongly cemented together: others select portions of reed, or hollow straws, leaving a long piece to project over the head; so that when resting at the bottom of the stream, it looks like a piece of sunken and broken reed; nor would you, unless you knew, suppose for a moment that it was the habitation of an insect. But the most skilful of all the caddis worms, which build under water, is the one which makes itself a hollow tube out of small stones, composed of such angles as would frighten any human architect; nor would a man attempt to form any thing like an arch out of such irregular materials, unless they were first cut and hewed into a proper form. Yet all this is managed by the little insect, selecting such stones as fit into each other, contriving also to leave the lower part smooth and even, so that it may drag its house along with greater ease when moving at the bottom of the stream; neither will water dissolve the cement used by these curious insects; nor must we omit stating that that por-

tion of the body which projects from the doorway of the cell is hard and firm, while the portion that remains within is soft. Thus you see that even they are adapted for their state, and armed against trifling accidents; and throughout all nature we shall find this to be the case—no matter how insignificant an insect may appear, it is so constructed as to be able to provide itself with food and shelter; and we cannot remove the decayed bark from a tree, the moss from a wall, or even a coiled-up leaf, without discovering, after a minute survey, that each of these is the home of some living object.

"The same wisdom," says Bonnet, in his "Contemplation of Nature," "which has constructed and arranged with so much art the various organs of animals, and has made them concur towards one determined end, has also provided that the different operations, which are the natural results of the economy of the animal, should concur towards the same end. The creature is directed towards his object by an invisible hand; he executes with precision, and by one effort, those works which we so much admire; he appears to act as if he reasoned, to return to his labour at the proper time, to change his scheme in case of need. But in all this he only obeys the secret influence which drives him on. He is but an instrument which cannot judge of each action, but is wound up by that adorable intelligence which has traced out for every insect its proper labours, as he has traced the orbit of each planet. When, therefore, I see an insect working at the construction of a nest, or a cocoon, I am impressed with respect, because it seems to me that I am at a spectacle where the Supreme Artist is hid behind the curtain."

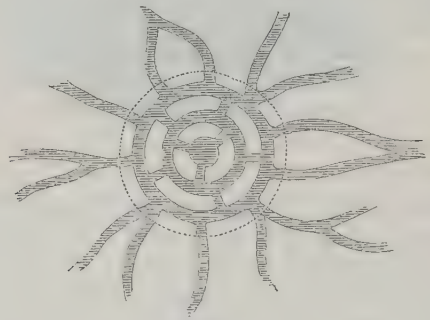
> "For the whole earth is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

This little hillock of earth, covered with wild thyme, amongst which the summer-bees are now murmuring, was thrown up by the

MOLE,

or Mouldi-warp, as it is called by the country-people; and if we had a spade, I would lay bare its little habitation, and show you such a wonderful encampment as you have rarely witnessed,—chambers, and galleries, and long winding passages, which lead in all directions; and when opened, look not unlike the old puzzle which is called the plan of Troy. The earth, as you may tell by placing your foot upon it, is very strong and solid, for it has been well pressed and well beaten by the mole while making it. At the bottom of this hillock there is a gallery almost as round as a ring, and there is a smaller one also above it, of the same form; and to get from one gallery to the other it has made itself five passages, which go upward. Is n't that something like a house think you, with five staircases, which lead to the upper story; but this is not half that I have got to tell you: it has also a chamber lower down than the lowest gallery which I have described, and you must know there is also another hole at the bottom of the chamber, which, after running down for a few inches, rises up again, and opens into a passage, or high road, if we may so call it, of the encampment. But when in this passage, it can

turn back again, and enter the circular gallery at the bottom, which we have before described, and take its choice of any of the nine streets which branch out from this lower passage. What a place would this be to play at "Hide and Seek" in, if it were but big enough; and as it is so very curious, we must present you with a picture of it. And here we give you an engraving of the nest, or



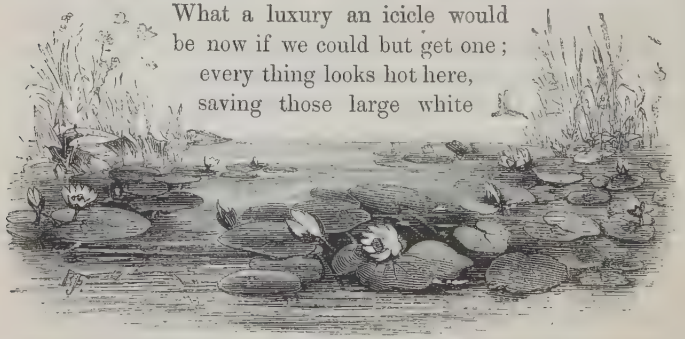
ENCAMPMENT OF THE MOLE.

Is it not wonderful! You little thought, while looking upon this uninteresting hillock of earth, that it covered in such a marvellous building as this. You might wonder for what purpose it wanted such a number of roads and galleries, looking so many different ways; but when I tell you that this is its chase, or forest, or hunting ground, and that it ranges here and there, up this passage, and down that, searching for earth-worms and insects, you will see at once the use of these numerous avenues, and the chance it has of obtaining larger quantities of food through having such extensive grounds to range in. But there is a larger run, which naturalists call the high road, and along this he passes many times in the course of the day, to visit his several hunting-grounds, which branch out every way; and I can tell you necessity causes the

moles to be very polite to each other, for only one at a time can pass along this common high-road, which seems to belong to the whole community of moles; so that, if two chance to meet, one is compelled to retire into one of the side-passages until the other passes; and sometimes this causes a fight, and then of course the weakest goes to the wall. But although they thus quarrel about the possession of the road, each seems to pay great respect to his neighbour's enclosure, one never taking possession of the hunting-ground another has made. It is in this common highway where the mole catchers place the traps, as they know he has to pass it many times in the course of the day, to see what game there is in his preserve. You must not always expect to find its nest under a mole-hill, for it is oftener placed at the end of three or four passages, at some distance from the encampment; when, if you are fortunate enough to light upon the right spot, you may sometimes dig out four or five young ones in summer. It is a thirsty animal, requiring much drink, and the high-road, which we have so often mentioned, as been used by the whole community of moles, is sure to lead to a common run, which opens out near some ditch or pond; but when water is far distant, they will sink a well of their own, and dig downward and downward until they come to water. In pursuing a worm, it will sometimes follow it to the surface of the earth, devour it, and return back again into its burrow. It always looks fat, and has a sharp tapering nose, well adapted for turning up the earth: its eyes are very small, and we should think of but very little use in so dark a habitation. The fur is soft as silk, and bright as velvet; its colour is a deep black, although by shining the hair in the direction in which it lies, it has a greyish appearance: its feet are furnished with sharp nails, with which its scoops and digs away the earth, throwing the loosened dirt behind as it progresses with its work, and which it afterwards carries up and forms into those hillocks which

we so commonly see. In winter, when the earth is frozen hard, and its hunting-ground is cold and useless, and produces no food, it will dig a deep hole straight down, in order to reach the worms that have taken shelter there from the cold. It is also a good swimmer, and cares no more about crossing a brook than a water-rat. You little dreamed that such a curious animal, and such a wonderful structure were to be found under this little hillock, which to look upon, saving for the few wild flowers which cover it, appears an object of no interest. And so shall we often find it in our walks through the world; we kick aside a hollow stone, without thinking of the years that it must have taken, and the countless millions of fallen drops of water, to have worn away that cavity, while others that are worn into all kinds of fantastic shapes, must have been tossing about in the ocean and on the earth for unnumbered ages.

Oh what a treat it is now to throw off one's coat and jacket, and lie down in the shade under some great tree, that stretches its broad branches far across the greensward! while it is so hot that I wonder how the little birds can hop up and down the big branches at all, or open their beaks to raise even a chirrup, covered as they are all over with warm feathers.



WATER-LILIES.

which seem sleeping amongst their broad dark leaves, on the clear waters of the moorland mere. Saw ye ever a more majestic flower? What a pure pearly white, showing the more clearly through being contrasted with the deep golden centre of the cup, and the rich green of the rounded leaves on which they seem to sleep. What grace there is in their motion, as they rise and fall with every ripple that ridges the broad surface of the mere! how cool and clear they are! and so they remain all night, closing, and half sinking down into the water, and sometimes scarcely leaving a leaf visible above the surface until sunrise the next morning, when they again open and lean upon their green silky beds, as they do now—the loveliest ladies of the lake: for "mere" is but the old Saxon name for a large pool or lake.

Pleasant is it to see a wild honeysuckle, hanging in long trails of crimson and white, along the wood-sides by which we pass; drooping above the red and white foxgloves with their beautifully speckled bells, which we used to gather and stick upon the tips of our fingers, calling them gloves: to see the glaring yellow charlock spreading every where over acres and acres of ground, with scarcely a patch of green between; recalling those fanciful gardens of the fairies which were covered every way with flowers of gold: to inhale the perfume of the meadow sweet, which approaches nearer the smell of the fragrant heliotrope than the costliest garden flower that ever was cultivated: to see the banks glowing with the rich tints of the mallow—a half rose-like flush: and, above all, to wander by the side of reedy ponds, where the tall yellow flowers of the water-flags give such a sunny and summer look unto the sedgy scenery. Mingling with, and almost overpowering every other fragrance, comes the drowsy odour from the bean fields,—the sweetest, saving that from the new-mown hay, of all summer smells. These were the pleasures that made our rural rambles so delightful; things which we dwell upon even now

with a sweet remembrance,—giving such a freshness to memory, and such a life-like reality to all we can recall, of the pleasant visions of our boyish days.

But I have got a laughable story to tell you about two old men, which you will find a good moral in; for it is a great shame, and very wicked to pick sport out of the infirmities of mankind, even if we do no injury to any one. I well remember a waggish youth who would have fun, whatever it might cost him, and never seemed so happy as when he was about some work of mischief; and when he could amuse himself no other way, he would begin playing tricks with his deaf uncle. There was an old neighbour, who lived opposite, quite as dull of hearing as his uncle was, for neither the one nor the other could hear himself speak; and it was the delight of this scapegrace of a nephew to set these two deaf old men together by the ears; and as neither of them could hear what the other said, you may readily imagine what a droll scene an explanation must have been between them. Like the king in "Hamlet," this graceless young scamp first poured his poison into the ear of one, then into the ear of the other; and he would begin by bawling out "Uncle!" into the drum of the ear of his deaf relative, who would lower his trumpet, and drink in every word of slander which this young mischief-maker uttered. "Uncle, old Billy Barton says you get drunk every night—that you run up a score every where, when any one will trust you—and that you owe money to every publican in Lincoln—and have never paid him the last half-guinea he lent you, uncle—and he stops every body he meets to tell them of it!"

"He 's an old rascal—and does n't speak the truth—and I 'll have an action against him—that I will—if it costs me every shilling I 'm worth. I 've never been intoxicated since the last election; and as to money, I never borrowed a farthing of him in my life, or of any body living—and I 'll go tell him

so to his face, that I will—the bad lying old rogue!" and he would take up his stout oaken walking-staff, and sally out to put his threat into execution, muttering to himself "fifty old rogues and a hundred old rascals;" and stamping his walking-staff savagely upon the ground every stride he took, until he worried himself into a regular towering passion, which was quite "nuts" to the rogue of a nephew; for the young scamp had been beforehand to old Billy Barton, cramming him with a parcel of lies, and telling him what his uncle had said about him.

"Mr. Barton!" he would holla into his ear, while old Billy was taking his walk at the other end of the town, "my uncle says you undid his stye-door last night, and let his pigs out—somebody saw you—and they 've eaten up all the peas and young cabbage, and rooted up the flower-beds, and done five pounds' worth of damage — and he 's gone to get a warrant out against you—and I thought I would tell you, that you might make it up with him without going to law."

You may easily fancy how old Billy raved and stormed after such a charge as this, for deaf as he was, he could make himself heard; and how he set off at once to repel the accusation and defend himself—not having time, in the heat of his passion, to inquire who this "somebody" was, that had seen him, and brought the charge against him.

Meantime the young scamp used to run and assemble his companions in the street, to witness, as he would say, "such a row between his uncle and old Barton;" and the nephew so managed matters, and measured his distance, that the two old men were almost sure to meet in the greatest thoroughfare in Lincoln. At it they would go as fast as ever their tongues could rattle, blowing one another up beautifully — foaming and raving, and stamping their sticks upon the ground, and clenching their fists in each other's faces—and neither of them hearing a word which the other said—but from the earnest

manner, and vehemence of action, each believing the other was maintaining the accusation which the mischief-making young dog had first founded. "You say I get drunk every night," the deaf old uncle would exclaim, stamping his stick as he spoke. "You say I turned your pigs out of the stye last night!" old Barton would exclaim, shaking his cane at him. "Shew me the man I ever owed a shilling to in my life!" roared out the one. "I never did anybody an injury since I was born!" bellowed the other. "I 'll have an action against you for damaging my character," shouted the uncle, loud enough to be heard half way down the street, so loud, indeed, that the word damage struck the dull drum of deaf Billy's ear, and he echoed between his teeth—"Damages, you old rogue, you let 'em out yourself—you know you did—on purpose to injure my character, because I voted against you at the last election—you rabid old Tory, you!" "I 've got as many half-guineas as you," hollaed out the old uncle; "and have no need to borrow of anybody, thank God! you vile, bad, wicked, slandering, thief-looking, unhung, old rascal! I shall see you some morning whipped at a cart's tail! Oh! I wish the good old pillories still stood; I would buy a hamper of rotten eggs to pelt you with, that I would!" and he would bring his huge stick within a foot of poor harmless deaf Billy's face; then they would begin to collar one another, and no doubt there would soon have been "battle royal" between them, had not some peace-loving neighbour have interfered, and, although he failed in reconciling them, patched up for the time a temporary cessation of hostilities.

So matters progressed, till the frequency of their quarrels caused some mutual friend to interfere, and inquire into the cause; when, to the astonishment and amusement of them both, "my nephew" was found out; and heartily did they laugh as the explanation was in turns hammered into their ears; and a dozen times did the merry old men rise and shake hands;

then sit down again to laugh; for the friend who reconciled them had concocted a scene of excellent mischief and retaliation, which they had agreed to put into operation; and the thought of it so tickled their old fancies with delight, that they roared again louder than they even did when abusing each other. Nay, we verily believe, that from the bottom of their hearts, they were glad that they 'd had so many quarrels without any cause, merely for the sake of the "making it up," as they called it, in the presence of their common enemy. Nor was it long before an opportunity presented itself; for the nephew had been at his old work, and they pretended, as usual, to believe all that he said; and so well did they mimic a passion, and conceal their designs, that he, suspecting nothing, bade us, as he 'd often done, to "make haste, and come along, to see such a row between his uncle and old Barton."

Wicked dogs that we were! No hounds ever set off with more willingness to hunt a fox, than we did to see a rupture between these two deaf old men; and, with the nephew at our head, away we went, helter-skelter, his laugh the loudest of all, and ringing out above all others, as if the entertainment had been got up for his sole amusement. Up he ran, rubbing his hands, and kicking his heels with delight, as he shouted, "Now they 're going to begin: take your places! Act 1st, Billy Barton stole uncle's chickens; Act 2nd, enter uncle to rob Billy Barton's apple-tree,—which, you know, we did for him. Up go the sticks; now for it! a real fight this time! Lay on, uncle! Strike hard, Billy!" And, without hearing, they both took him at his word; for they seized him in an instant, each laying hold of one side of his collar; and need I tell you, that we, who had so often laughed at his wickedness, were delighted to see him caught in his own trap? and, instead of pitying him, we only echoed his own words, and exclaimed, "Lay on, uncle! strike hard, Billy!"—and, although they broke no bones, I can assure you they gave him such a thrash-

ing as caused him to remember the day when he first set two deaf old men together by the ears. And long as it is since, I can scarcely refrain from laughing, whilst recalling the astonished look of the nephew when they seized upon him;—how he turned up the whites of his eyes first at one, then at the other, while his visage lengthened; and said (as plain as a countenance can speak), "caught at last!" But what made it less effective was, that both the old men laughed heartily the whole of the time they were beating him. First, the uncle began with, "I get drunk every night, do I!" Tap. Then came old Barton, with, "I turned your uncle's pigs out, did I!" Bang. Then again the uncle chimed in, with, "I robbed Billy Barton's apple-tree, did I!" Thump. Then again Barton took up the chorus, with, "I stole your uncle's chickens, did I!" Whack. And all this was diversified with so many "Oh dear mes!" and "Oh, I'll never do so no more!" and "Oh, I beg your pardon!" with an accompaniment of cuts and capers on the part of the culprit: now a shoulder up, then a leg, that, as his uncle said when he had done, "he had made him, for once in his life, dance without a fiddle; and it would be a great pity, after telling so many tales, that they should be left without a moral." And what was worse, every body in Lincoln said that it served the nephew right; and the only injustice in the affair was, that we, who had so often shared in and countenanced his sins, ought to have partaken of a portion of his stripes. But, on this point, I beg to assure you that we disagreed with our respected friends, and could not see at all that we ought to be punished for laughing at the mischief manufactured by another. They, however, thought different; and I must leave it to you to decide which were in the right!

You see that bird which keeps mounting upward like the skylark, but whose song is no more to be compared to the notes of that beautiful warbler than the clamour of the rook is to the gushing melody of the blackbird—that is the

SNIPE,

a bird which occasionally remains with us all the year, and is found in almost every part of England. In wet weather it resorts to the hills and woods, though its favourite haunt seems to be the meadows and marshes in the neighbourhood of rivers. It never wanders far for the materials with which it builds its nest. Should it be on a marsh, it takes the coarse grass which grows around it; if on a heath or moor, it makes use of the heather; generally, however, selecting a dry spot on which to build, but never far distant from some boggy or swampy place. The eggs, which are of an olive colour, blotched and spotted with dusky brown, are always found in the nest with their pointed ends placed inwards. The snipe is curiously marked. The black crown of the head is divided by a line down the middle; the back is black, and barred, and striped, with buff-coloured lines; the breast and belly white; and the black feathers of the tail spotted with deep orange towards the end. Some have compared the noise that it makes, when descending on the wing, to the bleating of a goat; and many believe that this peculiar sound is produced by its wings.

When mounting in the air, it utters a shrill, sharp, piping sound. You would be delighted to see how quick, and to what a depth it sends its pointed bill into the earth after worms, for its long beak is nearly a full third of the length of the neck and body.

And now I must say a few words about Frogs and Toads, wishing you at the same time to remember that I have, in two or three instances, attempted to enlist your kind feelings in favour of such poor inoffensive animals, as it has too long been the fashion to persecute, before I draw your attention to this ill-used and harmless race; sincerely believing that when you have read all I have got to say, you will never again, wilfully, destroy either a frog or a toad. "But a toad," you exclaim, "is a poisonous reptile!" Believe me when I tell you this is not the truth; on the contrary, it is perfectly harmless, may be rendered tame, and even be taught to eat out of your hand. True, it is far from prepossessing in its appearance; but this is no excuse for your destroying it: were we, on the contrary, to encourage it in our gardens, and protect it, we should soon perceive its usefulness in the diminution of insects and worms which make such havoc amongst vegetation. You would be delighted to watch it before seizing upon its prey. For a moment or two it remains perfectly motionless and fixed as a stone, its eyes bent upon the insect, and its head thrown forward; when, the instant the object moves, it is struck by the tongue of the toad, and drawn into its mouth; and so rapid is the action, that it is scarcely the work of a moment, and unless your eye happens to alight upon it in the very tick of time, you would discover that the insect had gone, without seeing when, or where. It is also very amusing to see it seize upon a large, long worm, especially if it happens to lay hold of it in the middle; the poor worm twists and turns all kinds of ways on the outside of the jaws of the toad, and by its twining and

struggling, endeavours to escape; but all in vain, for the toad makes use of its fore-feet, first shoving one end of it into its mouth, and then the other, until the whole is devoured. Gilbert White, in his "History of Selborne," tells us of some ladies who took a fancy to a toad, which used to come out every evening from a hole under the garden steps, and, after supper, was always taken up and placed upon the table, where it was fed: so that you see there were a few sensible people even more than half a century ago, who were not afraid of being poisoned by it. And Mr. Bell, in his "History of British Reptiles," makes mention of a very large one which he kept, that would sit on one of his hands while it eat from the other. I must also tell you, that the toad, like the snake, casts its skin, and now and then comes out with a new coat on his back, which he is, no doubt, as proud of as a charity boy is of his new suit at Easter. As to its being found alive in the centre of a solid rock, or in the heart of a large tree, where it has been supposed to have lived for hundreds of years, without either a mouthful of food or a breath of air, why I think it about as likely to be true as the tale of the horse, which its owner boasted he would teach to live upon nothing, and which, to nobody's astonishment but his own, died as soon as he began to reduce it to a straw a day. So has it turned out in every experiment which has been made to imprison toads, either in stone, plaster, or wood; and although they have lived much longer than might have been expected, they have generally been found dead at the end of a few months. One or two, I believe, have lived over a year in this state of imprisonment; but no animal requires less respiration, or, when not in motion, can live upon less food.

Those little dark-looking objects, which all of you must have seen swimming about by hundreds in ponds and ditches, with their large round heads and long tails, and something like

fins projecting out from each side of the neck, and which you call tadpoles, are young frogs; and were it not that thousands upon thousands of them are devoured by newts and small fishes, they would soon multiply to such an extent, that, when fully grown, they would overrun the land. Few animals have more persecutors than the poor frogs; it can never grow too big for the jaws of the voracious pike; almost every kind of water-fowl feeds upon it; it is the favourite food of the snake; and as for stoats and weasels and pole-cats, they devour them by hundreds; and there is hardly a bird of prey that does not feed upon them. Surely, then, this poor reptile has plenty of enemies, without being pelted to death or destroyed by cruel boys. Like the toad, it is a great destroyer of insects, and you will never find many slugs in a garden which is frequented by frogs; it takes its food in the same manner, by throwing forward its tongue, which, in a state of repose, doubles back as you would fold a leaf; its tongue also possesses a kind of sticky matter, to which the prey adheres. You have, no doubt, heard scores of them croaking when you have been walking out on a beautiful calm evening by the side of some long straggling dyke; and to me it has ever seemed far from an unpleasant noise: and during my rambles by the side of such places, I have always made a point of looking where I planted my foot, that I might avoid trampling any one of them to death. Like many other reptiles it sleeps during the winter, burying itself in the mud at the bottom of the water, where they are often found in draining or digging out a water-course, huddled together by scores; and I have seen a large spadeful of them lifted out at once. When spring comes they are all alive and kicking again; for it is then that they bring forth their eggs, from which come those thousands of tadpoles that we see at this season of the year. You will sometimes observe a quantity of black spots in a large mass of clear jelly floating on the surface of the water. These black spots are the eggs of

the frog. But the most wonderful thing in the structure of these harmless reptiles is, that they have the power of breathing through the skin. This has been proved by tying up the head tightly with a portion of bladder, in fact, literally hanging them, then placing them in a vessel under water. If you ever want to see how far a frog can leap without doing it any injury, strike the ground smartly a few inches behind where it is squatted, with a stick, and away it will jump an astonishing distance. I should tell you that you will never find the tail which you see on young frogs on any of the old ones. Their motions in the water are beautiful, and I know no better tutor to teach you the art of swimming than a frog. Only watch narrowly its attitude, stretch yourself out as it does with the head elevated, and strike out in the same way with the hands and feet, and take my word for it you will soon be able to swim.

This is a true English picture, a smooth-shaven green, the sunshine streaming upon it, and glancing on the canvas tents and white dresses of the

CRICKET-PLAYERS.

Just look how the batsman stands. His foot firm—his eye fixed—the ball is delivered, it bounds beautifully, just his favourite height. What a swing he takes with his arms; that blow would fell a bullock. The ball looks no bigger than a bee in the air, with such force is it struck—so high is it sent, far away beyond the long-fieldsman. "Run—run—run!" cries every voice; not a cross—not a slip; notch after notch is added, and the whole air rings again with the voices of the by-standers. But hush! a fresh bowler has taken up the ball; their favourite batsman looks a little thoughtful, for he well knows that peculiar turn of the wrist which so much baffles the ablest striker. Cautious and watchful are they both. "Play!" It comes quick as a shot, and is driven back with tenfold rapidity, and another shout rises high for the favourite batsman, though the ball was caught by one of the fieldsmen who faced it, with so sure an aim and so true a spring, that you would scarcely be astonished to see him stop and catch a ball fired from a cannon. A slower ball is next delivered by the bowler, who deceived all eyes but the batsman's, from whom there is no disguising his play, so well is he able to measure the speed of the ball from the very tick of time that it is first delivered. And yet these are but every-day players, and, beyond the limits of their own village not the name of one of them is known as a cricket-player.

Ah! I have seen this game played many a time as it ought to be on Nottingham Forest; for who has not heard of the Nottingham Cricket-Players, whose exploits have rung through all England? Such batters and bowlers as I never expect to look upon again. Well did the fieldsmen know their distance when a first-rate batsman went in; and ample range they gave him, for they knew that the ball, when struck by such a powerful arm, would fly off like a cannon shot. What stumping out and bowling out have I seen on that forest!

Oh! it is a noble game; and as for exercise, none better can be found. But I need not here enter fully into the particulars of the game, for they are recorded in the "Boy's Own Book;" and any description of mine would be but a repetition of what is already well told. Few, I imagine, can see this game played without feeling pleasure whilst looking on. The eager interest of the contending parties, the watchful eye and ever-ready hand, the foot planted to an inch, the distance run in such quick measured strides, give life and animation to the scene. The white dresses of the Cricketers, too, form a pleasing contrast to the green landscape; and the deep hum of so many voices bespeak the great interest which they take in the game. What grace there is in their motions; what symmetry displayed in their limbs, as they run, bowl, or strike, unencumbered by any superfluous drapery. It is well worthy of its appellation, and is deservedly called, the Noble Game of Cricket.

Just observe those sawyers at work in the sawpit—see how soon they cut down a large deal—how true they keep to the chalked marks, the man in the pit having a line drawn to guide him, as well as the man above—watch the clean sawdust as it falls, smooth as snow, though not so white—see the great piles of timber that stand piled round everywhere; planks for floors, and for roofs, joists, and centre beams, and huge trees full of knots, and the beautiful bark on them, covered here and there with such rich-coloured and velvet-looking moss. Oh, it sometimes smells like being in the midst of pleasant greenwood.

Old Dicky, one of the sawyers, is too aged to work now: he was a funny fellow, so kind to us boys; and once, when they were repairing a large sewer, which went under the theatre, Dicky and his mate were sent for to take the measure, and prop up the floor above, with strong beams of wood brought from their saw-yard, for the place was considered dangerous. "Now," said Dicky, at night, when they had done sawing and fitting

in the beams, and making all secure, "Now, my lads, if you've a mind to go into the theatre for nothing to-night, you can; for there's a hole open which leads into the pit, and I left a short ladder there; it will bring you out just under where the fiddler sits, so you can pop up one at a time, sit down where you like, and the money-takers will be none the wiser." Well, we thought this a capital chance to see the performance for nothing; and the theatre was no sooner open than down the sewer nearly half a score of us went like so many rats. We had a good way to go in the dark before we reached the ladder which Dicky had told us of, but we did reach it, and one after another got into the pit; but such a parcel of dirty, black, slimy little fellows as we were, you never saw in your life, for we had gone knee-deep through the black filth, which had, perhaps, never been disturbed for nearly a century. We sat down, however, black and covered with slime as we were. But the odour we had brought with us was unbearable. "What an unpleasant smell!" exclaimed one. "Sit further off," cried another. And what was worse than all, a score or more boys beside ourselves had learnt the secret, and kept bobbing up, and into the pit, about every minute or so, some of them having tumbled down in the sewer. A pit full of sweeps would have been more welcome companions. At last we were found out; the first act was over, down fell the curtain, and into the pit came the manager, and out we were bundled quicker than ever we came in. But what was worse than all, we rubbed against several boys who really *had* paid. But all in vain were protests and exclamations; the marks of the sewer were found upon them, and out they went along with the guilty. Never did a merry farce draw down more roars of hearty laughter than was heard in the old theatre that night; nay, if even the innocent boys who had unconsciously rubbed against us, only smelt of the kennel, they were bundled out with us; and what was worse than all, when we got out-

side, there was old Dicky, the sawyer, laughing at us; and to this day we believe it was he who told the manager, and who sent down all the dirty boys he could muster after us, and all Dicky said was, "You should have filled your pockets with sawdust, my lads, and given yourselves a good scrubbing on the ladder, then they would never have noticed you." And often afterward he twitted us, and asked us how we liked the play of "A Night in the Sewer, or the Black and White Rat-catchers who were caught in their own trap." Still we liked old Dicky, although he played us off such a dirty trick, and I believe it cured us from ever trying to steal into the theatre again without paying. Then we had another trick. It was too bad, but it made us laugh heartily, and what will not boys do for fun? We used to get a large-headed nail, which was as big as a sixpence, and file the top until it was as smooth and bright as silver, then thrust it tight down between the nick of two slabs on the pavement. First one would come by, then another, all believing it was a real sixpence; and when they stooped down with an intent to pick it up, lo! it was immovable: and then we were watching round the corner, and ready to laugh at every one we took in. One or two whom we had before deceived would take out their pocket-knives and carry off the nail, saying, "Good lads, this will come in useful some day or another." Then we slunk off, looking very sheepish, for the big-headed nail had cost some one of us a halfpenny. So you see the laugh in the end was always against us, as it ought to be with all who try to deceive people.

What sport we used to have at this time in running, leaping, swinging, and trying to outrival each other in all these and many other similar feats. Every boy who knows any thing about leaping, or jumping, knows what a cat-gallows is. You get two sticks with a few knots, or short projecting branches on them, and then you stick them into the ground, about a yard asunder. Then you place a slender

stick across them, almost like the letter H, only you are able to raise or lower the cross-bar, according to the knots or ends of the branches, just as you think you can manage to clear it without knocking down the slender stem which is laid across. If you have jumped over it at a certain height, perhaps the next boy, who has also gone over it, will raise it higher; if he clears it you must follow him; if you also leap clean over you must then raise it to the next stem, and you will be astonished to see how well you can jump after a few days of such practice; for there is no danger in it; you cannot hurt yourself; the slightest touch, and down goes the slender bar which is laid lengthwise across. After such trials as these, you then begin to venture at a stoup-and-rail fence; you must look to your shins while leaping over, for this is very different to the other; here all is hard, rugged, and substantial, and the safest way is to measure the height first, by standing beside the barrier; for you ought to know to an inch, by this time. how high you are able to jump. Either go over with full confidence at once, or give it up. If you once begin to waver and doubt, ten to one you graze your shins, and get laughed at by your more courageous companions. If you think you cannot clear it, confess and give in at once; you will save your bones by it, and all the other boys can say will be that they are better jumpers than you are. Leap-frog every boy knows how to play at, and he should be careful to hold his head well in, whilst "making a back;" but this is better exercise for cold weather than the hot months of summer. "Stag out" was a noble game for those who could run well. There was the Forester to see fair play; all the boys beside, saving the one who was the stag, were hounds, and their station was called the kennel. The boy who played the stag had a certain distance given him in advance, before the Forester cried "Stag out," which was the signal for the hounds to start. Whoever caught him first was the next stag. Still

there was a spot called "the covert," and if the stag could regain that without being caught, he was lord of the forest again. Our forest, be it remembered, had its boundaries, and beyond these neither hart nor hounds must run.

You see that long-legged, sharp-beaked bird, with a splendid plume of long, black, glossy feathers on his head, which look like the sable crest of a helmet; that is the

HERON,

who delights to wade up to his body in the water, and stick his sharp bill into the first fish that happens to swim near him. He is none of your sleepy-headed birds, who go to roost at sunset with his head under his wing; but will turn out on a fine moonlight night, like a thorough angler as he is, and pick up whatever he can catch, from a bleak up to a barbel; for, thin as he is, he has a most voracious appetite. The heron, like the rook, builds its nest on the trees; and

at one period there were a great number of heronries in England, and a few are still said to exist in Windsor Great Park; on the skirts of Bagshot Heath; near Beverley, in Yorkshire; and several other places. When hawking was so popular an amusement amongst the nobility of this country, the penalty for killing a heron was twenty shillings, or three months' imprisonment, unless the bird was captured by flying a hawk at it, or destroyed by the long-bow. In former times this bird was called a heronshaw; and there is an old adage still existing, often applied to a stupid person who cannot comprehend any thing clearly, which says, that "he would not know a hawk from a handsaw;" the latter word being a corruption of heronshaw. The heron builds a slovenly-looking nest, formed of sticks placed crosswise, and lined with grass or rushes, with a thin covering of feathers or wool. Sometimes the rooks and herons have been known to wage war for the possession of the trees to build in; and the battle has terminated with loss of lives, and many wounded on both sides, though victory at last alighted upon the plumed heads of the herons, who compelled the rooks to abandon the trees, fly further off, and found a new colony. It is also on record, that when the heron has been closely pursued by the hawk, and found he could not escape, he has made a sudden descent, turning himself upon his back as he sank downwards, so that when his pursuer alighted upon him, the sharp bill of the heron pierced through the body of the hawk. The heron may be often found standing, with one leg drawn up, by the sides of rivers and fish-ponds, where he watches for hours together, silently, and patiently for his prey.

Looking at that heron has recalled an old schoolfellow—I think I see him now, bringing the heron home under his arm, and turning it loose on his mother's clean house-floor, where it went striding about, and every where left the marks of its dirty feet, until the poor old lady got into such a rage

that she drove it out of the door, and over the houses it flew, and was never seen again.

Whilst young, as you are now, fresh faces will have fresh charms; but when you grow older, you will often, like me, think of the companions of your youthful days, and recall the many happy hours you have passed with those who, since then, perhaps are dead. Such companions I once knew, and one of them, named Billy Maiden, whose memory has been recalled by the heron, I shall long remember: oh, he was a fellow full of fun, made rhymes, riddles, and all sorts of "nonsensitives," which you could not help laughing at if you tried ever so. I shall never forget one puzzling question which he used to put to us about a fox, three geese, and a basket of oats, and how a ferryman had to take them over the river, one at a time. Now, you know, if he took the fox over first (Billy would say), the geese would be sure to eat up the oats; if he took the geese over first, why then he must either fetch the fox or the oats next; if the fox, why it would kill the geese; if the oats, he was just where he started, for the geese would eat them up whilst he went back again for the fox. Well, the old ferryman did not know what to do, until at last a bright thought came across his mind all at once; and away he went, across the river, with the three geese, leaving the fox with the oats; the next journey he carried the fox over, and brought back the three geese, which he left on the opposite side, and went across with the oats; these he left once more with the fox, and then fetched the geese again. So you see he was compelled to make an extra trip, or else either lose the geese or the oats; and he used always to conclude his story by saying, "Better do a thing well, if it takes you a little longer, than badly, and have to do it all over again, and perhaps be a loser into the bargain." For Billy mostly ended with a moral. He used to boast that he could talk dog-latin, and puzzled us very much at first by his method of linking three or four

words together; such as "infirtaris, intimberaleis, instraw-cornis, inoaknoneis," which, by his rapid manner of pronunciation, had certainly a most awful Latin sound, but which, when pronounced slowly, though certainly not the most intelligible English, simply signified that "in fir tar is, in timber ale is, in straw corn is, in oak none is;" such was Billy's translation of his own dog-latin. Then he pretended to make poetry too; but oh, such poetry; bless you, it was none of his own after all, although he pretended it was such; as,—

"Coffee and Tea
S—O—L—D."

the D of course rhyming to Tea, and the names of the four letters forming the last line. Then his rhymes!—

"Sing, oh sing, ye heavenly Muses,
While I mends my boots and shoeses."

On the death of a kitten, only two days old, was better,—

"My days on earth they were so small,
I wonder why I came at all."

He made a couplet on our old schoolmaster, when a boy, for which he got soundly thrashed; and he used often jokingly to say, that he was more successful than a many young authors, for he got *paid* for his first article. Our schoolmaster's name was Flint, and he had a cast in his eye. Billy could not resist making a couplet, and thus it ran:—

"Old Daddy Flint, with his squint, sees double;
And if one boy laughs, two are sure to get into trouble."

Then he used to have such droll questions, and ask us, "how the first hammer was made;" and wagging his fore-finger quickly, he would say, "Can you do this, and hold your finger still?" These things seem very silly now, but they made us laugh heartily when we were boys. When he wanted to get us out to play on a moonlight night, he used to sing an

old stanza in the street, which I doubt not our forefathers chanted before us :—

> "Lads and lassies, come out to play,
> The moon it shines as bright as day;
> Come with a whoop, come with a call,
> Come with a good-will, or do n't come at all."

Poor fellow, his was a melancholy end!—his giddiness and light-heartedness were the cause of his death. He was sitting, one summer evening, with his legs outside the head of the boat, repeating his quaint rhymes and odd sayings, and making us all laugh instead of attending to what we ought to have done, when the tide, or heygre (which I have before described), came upon us unawares, washed him away, half-filled the boat with water, and we never again saw him alive. Peace to his memory! he was beloved by us all.

School-days are said to be the seasons when friendships are formed; but it is not so: the boy we loved is too often another being when he grows up to manhood. Never, however, shun your old companion, because he is poor, and not so fortunate as yourself; for no one can foresee the changes which may take place in this life. Never refuse his hand in after days, though it may be hardened by labour, and tanned by toil, unless he has sullied his fair name by dishonest and shameful deeds; for there is no manliness in petty pride; you may be richer than he is, but not a bit the better man for that: if you are wealthier, he will feel himself all the more honoured by your recognising him, and the pleasure will be mutual, for poverty oftener warms the heart than chills it—old friendships are its only solace; and whatever other books may tell you, believe me, things are not as they were; a man must have something beside riches now-a-days, to make himself beloved. The time is at hand when people will not run a mile to see a duke, or if they do, they will go home, like old Betty Cawthre, and say, "Why it was only a man after all!" Stars and garters

are not looked upon as they were in former days, for they are but the workmanship of man: a good name is better than a thousand such foolish and childish baubles as these; and Howard, the philanthropist, did more good for his fellow men than all the Wellingtons that ever fought. I hate to see a parcel of English boys gather around another, and pay him homage, because some day or another he will be richer than they are ever likely to be. Protect a weak boy, a poor boy, one who has nobody to stick up for him—this is true nobleness; but the other is mean, selfish, and not honourable. I should like to put true English hearts into you: manly feelings, noble thoughts, a contempt for every thing sordid, base, mean, vicious, and selfish, and make you feel that you will some day be called upon to play your part on the stage of the great country that gave you birth.

But see, there runs a

WILD RABBIT

under the fern and between the gorse, and it is by this time concealed in its sandy burrow beside the wood. Nay, it is

no use chasing it; I saw the white tail as it ran into its hole. You may always tell a rabbit from a hare, by the shortness of its head and the grey colour of the back. I love to sit on a green bank on a sunshiny day, and watch the young rabbits playing together on an open sandy warren, they do so run and jump; but if they once catch sight of you, off they go, and are out of sight in less than a minute. You would scarcely credit the number of rabbits that are produced in a season; and were it not that they fall a prey to so many birds and animals, and are also destroyed for food by man, they would soon devour every thing that is green and eatable for miles around. You all of you know what tame rabbits are; and there are but very few boys who have not kept rabbits at one time or another; and I dare say you have often noticed how fond they are of scratching up the earth, if ever they can find a soft place—for although they were born in a hutch, and never in their lives saw either a heath or a warren, nor were ever taught to burrow in the earth; yet their natural instinct teaches them to try: and no doubt, were they turned loose on a warren, they would soon become diggers and delvers, like their wild companions.

Hitherto I have only given a passing glance at a few of our favourite summer flowers; and to make you better acquainted with them I must take a closer survey, which I have no doubt will be both instructive and amusing to you all. First I will begin with the beautiful blue forget-me-not, which is to be found by the side of streams, and, like the water-lily, springing out of the water. When once you have seen it you will always know it again; it is a species of scorpion-grass, in shape resembling the primrose, although ten-times smaller, and the clear yellow spot in the centre forms a beautiful contrast to the rich blue by which it is surrounded. Its very name is pleasing, and it is often enclosed in letters, and sent from one friend to another; for what can

be a more poetical and delicate representative of affection than a pretty wild flower called the forget-me-not. I have before mentioned the convolvulus, or bind-weed; so called from its twining around every thing it can touch: even the very grass in the fields is wreathed with the little pink convolvulus, the smell of which is delightful; and I know but few things that look prettier than that handsome flower, winding around two or three ears of corn; and there are but few flowers that can be twined into such beautiful forms; and sometimes you may come unaware upon a group of children who are busy making themselves belts, and scarfs, and coronals, and wreathing into a hundred fantastic forms every convolvulus they can sieze upon whilst

GATHERING WILD FLOWERS,

and attiring themselves with the long strings of the red and white convolvulus with which the hedges are netted and curtained over. I must also tell you that all these climbing plants do not twine the same way; many wind round from left to right, others again from right to left; thus the bryony

and the bind-weed both turn different ways, one towards the sun and the other from it; nor will they coil any other way, twine them and tye them as you may, but if forced against their nature speedily droop away and die. Sometimes the large white convolvulus will cover the whole face of the hedge where it grows, and lead you to think that it was from the hedge itself such handsome flowers sprung: the leaves, which are heart-shaped, are almost as beautiful as the flowers. You have all seen the handsome blue convolvulus, starred with white, that grows so commonly in our gardens; and if you have paid close attention to it, you must have observed that it closes its bell, and "goes to bed," that is, shuts itself up, about four o'clock: and there are a number of flowers which close at certain hours, and are as regular as the clock, and you might tell the time of day to a few moments by noting down the particular periods at which they fold themselves up. The scarlet pimpernel, which grows so common in the corn-fields, always closes before rain, and is called in the country the shepherd's warning and the little weather-glass: it is of a beautiful bright scarlet colour, and as pretty a wild flower as ever grew. Another slender and graceful flower, which we often meet with in the open heath, or on banks sheltered by the hedges, is the blue and delicate harebell, in form so light and slender that the least breeze which blows causes its azure cups to wave. In many botanical works the harebell is described as having round leaves, and those who have gathered it, and found upon it long bladed grass-like foliage, have concluded that they must be mistaken in the flower, although, if they had examined it closely on its first appearance, they would find these rotund-shaped leaves growing upon the bottom of the stem; but these fade and die away as the plant attains its full growth, and bursts out into bloom. Neither is it an uncommon occurrence to find the leaves which spring

around the roots of several flowers varying from those which shoot out higher up the stem. Every boy knows the beautiful rose-coloured mallow, for there is scarcely a bank in summer that is not adorned with it, although the spot is often divested of almost all other vegetation; country children gather the seeds, and call them cheese-cakes, and you may often see a group of lusty children at a cottage door, with a pinafore full of these flattened cakes, playing at "feasting."

There are no words in the English language which bring before the "eye of the mind" sweeter associations than those of home and flowers. They both recall the age of childhood, and when we become men the pleasures of their remembrance is still dwelt upon with unabated joy. We never forget the flowers that

"Do paint the meadows with delight,"

as Shakspere has happily said. And perhaps, in our childish days, we thought oftener about the flowers, than we did of any other objects in the country, even as Wordsworth, who is a beautiful writer of poetry, did, and who has said,—

"For oft when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They *flash upon that inward eye*
Which is the bliss of solitude.
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."

The lines printed in Italics mean the thoughts; which you all know can recall distant objects, and remembered scenes, and bring them so clearly before the mind, that our fancy can see them, even to a stile, a tree, a cottage—the form of the very garden-bed, and the faces of our friends, although they are hundreds of miles away.

I have only pointed out a few of the commonest flowers which you will meet with during a summer walk, not fearing but that when you have gathered and examined these, you will

be tempted further by the beauty and delicacy of scores of others which I have not named, and which you will gladly dig up and transplant to your little gardens, in order that they may recall the pleasant places you have visited in your rambles; and while you watch them fade and wither, you will think how differently they looked in those wild sweet nooks where the profuse hand of Nature had originally scattered them. When we look on a landscape in the distance, and see the rich and refreshing green of the trees and fields, we involuntarily exclaim, "Oh! how beautiful!" but when we wander among the grass, and explore the banks, and see almost every spot dotted with hundreds of wild flowers, we are struck with astonishment at the wonder-working hand of Nature, and gaze in admiration at the beautiful effects the seasons produce. We feel that some great and unseen power has been at work here; and we need no other instructor than the reason which we are gifted with, to tell us that all these marvellous productions were formed by His mighty hand, who created all things in heaven and on the earth.

Nor do His marvels end here. In the deep unexplored chambers of the ocean are hidden hundreds of wonderful things which the eye of man hath not yet seen; and it is only now and then that some buried object becomes revealed, as if to show us how little we know of what hath yet to come. Spots of earth which have slept undisturbed for ages are dug up, and we discover the skeletons of extinct animals which have never inhabited the earth in the memory of man, nor been met with alive in the remotest spots which ever human foot hath traversed. Huge turtles, and far-stretching lizards, and gigantic mastodons—monsters that swam, and bellowed, and shook the ground, long before we can trace any record or vestige of man. We find the remains of fishes on the summits of high hills, and under the beds of deep rivers the bones of unknown animals; the tusks of the wild boar, the teeth of the

elephant, are mingled with the remains of the wolf, and found in many a wild spot excavated by the geologist, whose explanations only puzzle us the more, as he endeavours in vain to show how they came together: and these remains are found in the very England in which we now live. They tell us how this island was once covered with the ocean; that the sea settled down, and then dry land appeared, covered with a vegetation that bears but little resemblance to that which we now see; that strange creatures swam across from neighbouring shores, and lived upon it for ages; and then large portions of the land were again submerged beneath the waves. And so the land accumulated, layer upon layer, earth upon earth—the growth of unrecorded centuries—the silent work of age upon age, before the voice of man ever broke the awful stillness of that vast solitude.

Flowers again which ever way we turn! but my book will be filled with descriptions of nothing else, if I stop to describe a twentieth part of those we pass. How beautiful looks that tall chestnut-tree, with its grand cone of flowers, tapering upward to a starry point; what a delicious shade its broad green leaves make; and what a deep murmuring is ever kept up by the golden-belted bees, as they plunge into its fragrant blossoms. That beautiful deep lilac-coloured flower, which you see growing amongst the wheat, is commonly called the corn-cockle. What a grace there is in those five long green points which branch out at every angle of the petals: you might fancy that they were spears pointed by unseen fairy hands, to protect the beauty of the flower. Beside it grows the large ox-eye daisy, with its broad golden crest, which looks as if set within a star of silver, forming a beautiful contrast to the deep scarlet of the poppy, which hangs its silken head like a folded banner, that droops motionless on the air. But we must pass by the beautiful blue-bottle, whose rich tint appears to greater advantage beside the paler peach of the corn-cockle.

What a strange-looking scarecrow have they planted in the centre of this corn-field. Saw ye ever a human figure like the one they have attempted to form out of the old ragged blue coat, crownless hat, and too odd gaiters; all stuffed with straw no doubt by the bird boy himself, whose clapper and cry we hear from the hedge-side, under which he is now sheltering, instead of getting up, and beating about with his long pole to scare away the crows. Bloomfield, in his beautiful poem entitled the "Farmer's Boy," gives an admirable description of the

BIRD-BOY TENTING THE CORN,

and falling asleep while the "sparrows drop one by one" from the hedge amongst the wheat. You almost wonder how

the little fellow manages to pass away the day by himself, amid the solitude of these fields, and yet I doubt not but what he finds amusement enough in chasing the young birds which have but just begun to fly; for solitary as the life of the bird-boy may appear he has always objects at hand, both to improve and amuse him. There is something wild and romantic in leading this lonely life in the fields, far removed as that boy is from either village or homestead. Above his head he sees the great grey clouds as they float silently along across the unbounded wilderness of the sky. Silent, save for the hoarse caw of the black rook, that flaps its wings, and floats like a spirit between earth and heaven; around him rise tall majestic trees, and he looks on, wondering how many years they have taken to reach that giant height. Far away as he is from any road, and in the very heart of the extensive fields, from day to day, he hears no human sound but the singing of the birds, and the murmur of the wild bee; for miles around him the fields are shut in until the hay and corn harvest is over; he sees the grey rabbits emerge from their burrows in the banks, and watches their young ones as they run in and out among the standing corn; and he makes all kinds of curious snares, none of which will act, or catch them; he peeps through some hole in the hedge, and watches the hares as they play together and chase each other through the long grass; he mocks the cuckoo as she sings upon some distant tree, and sends back sound for sound over the silent landscape, for it is a treat to him to hear his own voice; he rattles his wooden clapper until his arm aches, and sings the very song which was sung above a hundred years ago by his forefathers, when they were boys, and "tented" corn like him—and which we have heard scores of times during our summer rambles—as the sound rung upon the air, and floated over the landscape:—

Away birds, away!
And come no more to day;

Away birds, away!
Take an ear, and leave an ear,
And come no more for seven long year;
Away birds, away!

A real summer sound is that merry bird-boy's ancient song; and I can well remember the day when wearing a little blue smock-frock and heavy ankle-boots, I sallied forth in the early morning into the green fields of Thonock, and wakened the sleepy echoes of Warton Wood, with my loud bird-clapper and noisy song, while Gip, the shepherd-dog, barked in chorus. A merry life did I lead in those days, for my uncle was a great good-natured farmer, who trusted me with his gun, never caring what I shot, so long as I did not shoot myself; and when I had nothing else to fire at, I used to plant my brown napless hat upon some gate-post, and if very lucky indeed, probably hit it one time out of ten. Oh what a proud day was that when I shot a great staring white owl, and carried it triumphantly into the old-fashioned farm-house; my laurels, however, were somewhat fallen, when told by my kind-hearted aunt that it was a cruel deed to kill a poor inoffensive bird.

Alas! alas! every one seems to rest on the Sabbath but the poor bird-boy; he must be at his post Sunday and all days alike, to prevent the birds from eating up the corn—poor little fellow, I pity him! Let us walk further until we are far beyond the sound of his clapper, to where a true Sabbath-like silence reigns. What a lovely prospect have we here! for beautiful and tranquil as the country ever looks, compared to the deafening din and stifling smoke of cities, there is still a holier repose and calmer tranquillity hanging around it on the Sabbath, as if even Nature herself was resting in the midst of her works. A hallowed quietude seems to reign about the earth, the voices of the labourers are no longer heard in the fields—the creaking of the wagon, the cracking

of the whip, and the shouting of the driver are exchanged for the softened sound of the distant village-bells, that peal far and wide over the surrounding landscape, echoing from the wood, and reverberating from the steep hill-side, until dying away in their very faintness among hollow dells and hidden dingles. Far as the eye can reach you see rustic groups threading their way over many a winding footpath and broad high-road; along the wood, and across the hill, and out of the valley, they pour, in all kinds of picturesque costumes, and all journeying onward towards the same place,—to where the tall spire points its silent finger to the sky, as if beckoning them to that hallowed spot; there to kneel, where their grey forefathers before them have for ages knelt, at the footstool of the Almighty Creator. The village church seems to rise up like the temple of God in the midst of His own beautiful works,—for there are neither tall chimnies nor huge manufactories at hand to proclaim the power and triumph of man over labour, in the wonderful construction of machinery. All around you is primitive, simple, and pastoral. Those rustic worshippers move along with feelings which are almost unknown to the indwellers of cities, for their existence hangs upon the very changes of the elements,—they feel that they are approaching Him who hath power to hold or give the rain, whose mighty hand can throw a shadow across the sunshine, and prevent its warmth and light from reaching the earth, "who sendeth seed-time and harvest," and poureth His bounteous plenty over the land: they live under the eye of heaven,—the blue sky or the green leaves are ever above and around them; they are hemmed in with the works of God's own hand, instead of the walled cities built by man.

On the Sabbath you seem to walk more alone amid His works; you no longer behold man there at his labour, though the flowers blow, the birds sing, and the bee goes on murmuring beside the river that pauseth not in its low sweet

song, yet even these sounds seem subdued, as if they felt the holy stillness which pervades the Sabbath. All around speaks of peace; which ever way you turn the eye you see some object which tells you that man has ceased from his labour,—the broad-wheeled wagon stands motionless in the shed, the edge of the sharp scythe is covered, and hung upon the wall, the horses move to and fro almost without a sound, for they are no longer cumbered by their jingling harness; even the very shepherd-dog lies coiled up in a corner, basking in the sunshine, as if he too knew that it was a day of rest; for a dreamy quietness seems to have settled down upon every field, farm, and homestead. You miss the noisy prattle of the village children in the green lanes, the whistling and singing of the elder ones as they went to and fro on their errands from field to farm—for they are gathered together under the slated roof of the humble Sunday school; and at intervals (from the open windows) you catch the faint sound of some plaintive hymn, while they raise the song of praise which ascends unto Heaven. And on this day the poor labourer, who has passed the whole week amid the quiet and solitariness of the fields—leaving his cottage early in the morning, and returning to it again late in the evening to find his children asleep as when he left them, after being wearied with their long day's play—even he has the pleasure of seeing them one day out of seven, gathering round his table, and climbing upon his knees, and telling him about all the wonderful things they have seen and heard since the last Sabbath,—fondly asking him when it will be Sunday again, and hoping it will come soon that he may spend the whole day at home with them.

The very village seems to sleep in the still sunshine of the Sabbath—the air no longer rings with the heavy hammering of the blacksmith, his shop is closed and the rustic gossip gone that leant for the hour together over the unlatticed

window-sill; the plane no longer whistles in the joiner's shed; around the wheelwright's door every axle is at rest, and you behold only the proud cock and his feathered dames scratching amongst the chips and shavings: if the children sit beside the village brook, you miss the little boat which was so great an object of interest to them, for it is put away somewhere until the following day; and all they have to amuse themselves with now is, to throw in a weed or a flower and watch it float silently away. The hoop is hung up in the shed, the kite on its accustomed nail behind the door, bats and balls are all taken away, the little barrow lies with its wheel uppermost at the bottom of the garden, the spotted wooden horse without its head is thrust underneath the seat in the summer-house, and the tiny cart, which is filled with new occupants from morning until night, the scene of many a squabble and many a kiss, has for one day found rest for its weary wheels.

In the woods you find the same Sabbath-like silence reign,—you no longer hear the sound made by the old fagot-gatherer as she snaps some fallen and rotten bough sharply asunder, before thrusting it into her huge bundle of sticks; you miss the noisy shouts of the boisterous bird-nesters, and no longer see their ragged figures diving in and out of the underwood as they examine bush after bush, and tree after tree. The axe of the woodman is silent. In the vast fields that slope down the hill sides, dipping and stretching away to the very verge of the river, not a human figure is visible, unless it be some wandering pedestrian enjoying his solitary Sunday walk. Where but the day before you saw groups of men, and women, and children busily employed in field-work, now nothing moves—their rakes and hoes and weeding-hooks are thrown together in a heap beside the hedge, there to await the coming morrow. Even on the river the boats are moored, just in the place where the last tide left them, for

they have not moved a single length since the Sabbath-day settled down; the angler has left its banks, and the rower has quitted his boat, the wheel of the water-mill is still; and all you see of motion there is the willows swaying idly in the breeze, and the water-flags rocking to the rippling of the current, or the solitary

WATER-CRAKE,

which is a very scarce bird, and, like the bittern, fond of sheltering in marshy and reedy places; for it can both swim and dive, but, like many a boy who has neither the courage nor the industry to master these necessary accomplishments, it prefers wading, and for this purpose chooses shallow water, where it feeds principally upon worms, slugs, and insects. Like the land-rail, it is a bad flyer, and seems to trust more to its legs than its wings; it will also squat down in a similar manner to the former bird, to conceal itself; and its hiding place is very difficult to be found, unless sought out by dogs, but to-day there is no one to disturb it. It generally builds in damp osier-beds, or in the midst of thick patches of water-

flags, forming its nest of coarse grass and reeds, in which it commonly lays six eggs, as white and spotless as the purest ivory. The upper part of the plumage is a brown olive interspersed with black; the under part ash colour, mixed with brown, while the sides are chequered with black and white feathers. Many who have seen it in the winter have mistaken it for the corn-crake, which they supposed to have changed its plumage in the autumn, not knowing that the land-rail migrates at that season.

But let us leave the river side, and cross these fields and enter the weather-beaten gates of the old churchyard, for service is over, and the congregation are about to depart to their rural homes, many of which are two or three miles off, laying in lonely and out-of-the-way places, so remote that many of the neighbours only see each other when they meet at church, or at the neighbouring market-town; and what kind greetings and fond inquiries do we hear, of who is ill—who is well—who has gone away—who has returned—who is born—who is married—and who, also, is dead. There you see old age leaning on its staff and slowly spelling out some half-obliterated epitaph on a tombstone—a fond mother steps aside and pauses to look for a moment upon the grave of the lost daughter she so fondly loved, while her little son clings fondly to her gown, and innocently inquires when sister will come home again?—a father shakes hands with a son he has not seen for a long time, for he is out at place at a solitary farm-house, miles away, and it is only now and then, when his master is kind enough to feed the cattle during his absence, that he can be spared to attend church, and partake of the homely meal under his father's roof. In a country churchyard even the very children know who was last buried: they miss the great farmer, in his blue coat and top-boots; they miss the few halfpence, also, which he used to throw amongst them, when they ran to open the heavy white gate which, hung

upon the jaw-bones of a mighty whale, led to the high-road across the common. They wonder what has become of his strong black horse and the playful dog that used to leap up and lick their faces; and so wondering they stand in silence beside his newly-made grave: for in a country village the inhabitant is soon missed from his accustomed place—there is a blank left—a vacant space that wants filling up—a something that moved, and spoke, and crossed their path almost every day, that amid the jostling and crowding of a great city might have glided into the grave unnoticed; whilst in a village a painful void is left behind, for the place he knew forgetteth him not, until a whole generation is swept away.

Nor ought we ever to forget, that amid all the business and pleasure and enjoyment of this life, it is ordained that we once shall die,—that this earth is not our abiding place, but that there is another and a better world, where there is no sorrow, where friends are never again separated, where true happiness only exists, where not an evil feeling nor an evil thought can enter, and that if we "do unto others as we would they should do unto us," avoid vice, and seek only to be virtuous, that if we do these things we shall be enabled to look upon death as a welcome sleep after the long day's journey of life is done,—a sleep from which we shall awake to a brighter morning in a happier world.

Solemn and strange, on a summer Sunday evening, sounds the booming of the bittern in the twilight: it is but fancy, yet after the hushed silence of so hallowed a day, the strange, droning, unearthly tones of that solitary bird seem to fall subdued upon the ear, especially if your walk is beside some low, swampy, moorland, the bank which runs between a river and some damp rushy marsh, where the sound of the water comes with a low babbling, "ribble-bibble" upon the shore, and every now and then the willows give a sharp rustle, and then again are still. At such times may often be heard, on a

summer evening, that loud, dismal, hollow kind of sound, as if a bull was buried in a bog, and bellowing to get out again,—for such is the noise made by the booming of the

BITTERN,

a bird which is not at all common in the present day, and is oftener heard than seen. The ignorant country people believe that it produces this sound by thrusting its head under the water, or by forcing its long pointed bill into a hollow reed; but the truth is, its windpipe is peculiarly constructed: it can draw in at once a large quantity of air, and, by the aid of its powerful lungs, drive it out again at pleasure; and by this means it produces this loud, wild, unearthly sound. The bittern is a beautifully marked bird, principally covered with a pale yellow plumage, dotted with endless variegated spots

and deep streaks of black. It builds a coarse nest of sedge and water-plants, in which it lays four or five light olive-green coloured eggs. It is but seldom seen in the day-time, as it then hides amongst the reeds and sedges in the low lands and marshes, from whence it commences its loud booming call in the evening. It lives upon fish, frogs, insects, lizards, and snakes, when they chance to come in its way. It never flies far at a time when it is started from its hiding-place; and when only slightly wounded by the sportsman, it will courageously attack the spaniel that dares to capture it. Southey makes mention of the bittern in one of his poems, and says,

> "At evening, o'er the swampy plain,
> The bittern's boom came far."

Still there is ever something calm and beautiful about the repose of evening, and, as I have not hitherto introduced much poetry into my book, I must here insert a few verses, which I wrote several years ago, descriptive of

A SUMMER EVENING.

Another day, with mute adieu,
Has gone down yon untrodden sky;
And still it looks as clear and blue
As when it first was hung on high:
The sinking sun, the darkening cloud,
That drew the lightening in its rear,
The thunder, trumping deep and loud,
Have left no footmark there.

The village bells, with silver chime,
Come softened o'er the distant shore;
Though I have heard them many a time,
They never rang so sweet before—
A silence rests upon the hill,
A listening awe pervades the air;
The very flowers are shut, and still,
And bowed as if in prayer.

And in this hush'd and breathless close,
O'er earth, and air, and sky, and sea,
A still low voice in silence goes,
Which speaks alone, great God, of Thee—
The whispering leaves, the far-off brook,
The linnet's warble fainter grown,
The hive-bound bee, the homeward rook,
All these their Maker own.

Now shine the starry hosts of light,
Gazing on earth with golden eyes:
Bright sentinels that guard the night,
What are ye in your native skies?
I know not! neither can I know,
Nor on what leader ye attend,
Nor whence ye came, nor whither go,
Nor what your aim nor end.

I know they must be holy things
That from a roof so sacred shine,
Where sound the beat of angel wings,
And footsteps echo all divine.
Their mysteries I never sought,
Nor harkened to what science tells,
For, oh! in childhood I was taught
That God amidst them dwells.

The deepening woods, the fading trees,
The grasshopper's last feeble sound,
The flowers just wakened by the breeze,
All leave the stillness more profound.
The twilight takes a deeper shade,
The dusky pathways darker grow,
And silence reigns in glen and glade,
While all is mute below.

And other eves as sweet as this
Will close upon as calm a day,—
Then, sinking down the deep abyss,
Will, like the last, be swept away,

Until eternity is gained,—
  The boundless sea without a shore,
That without time for ever reigned,
  And will when time's no more.

Now nature sinks in soft repose,
  A living semblance of the grave;
The dew steals noiseless on the rose,
  The boughs have almost ceased to wave;
The silent sky, the sleeping earth,
  Tree, mountain, stream, the humble sod,—
All tell from whom they had their birth,
  And cry, "Behold a God!"

Do you know what that is you just kicked aside with your foot? Some great, dead, prickly cone, say you? Not at all: it is a live

HEDGEHOG,

whose only safety when danger is at hand, is in rolling itself up into that round, impenetrable ball. Nay, there is no making him unroll unless he pleases; and I can tell you, it must be a courageous dog to worry him. But it would be cruel to set a dog on such an inoffensive animal. Rolling must hurt it, and, no doubt, causes the spines to press

heavily upon the skin. I remember keeping one when a boy, which I fed upon bread, milk, meat, or any thing which chanced to be at hand. Its usual food is insects, snails, worms, frogs, toads, and mice, and it will even attack and devour a snake, which it will give a sharp bite on the back, and then coil itself up again in an instant. After having waited a short time, the hedgehog will again unroll itself, and give the snake another bite, then as quickly form itself again into a round ball of prickly spines; and so it will go on, opening and shutting, biting and coiling itself up, until it has broken the snake's back, when it will begin at the tail and eat upwards and upwards until the whole of the snake is devoured. Its favourite feeding time is in the night, and it is very fond of hiding in some dark corner during the daytime. It sleeps through the whole of the winter. It is considered a great destroyer of black-beetles, and is often kept for that purpose. The young, like kittens and puppies, are born blind, and there are generally from three to five in a litter. By some they are reckoned excellent eating; and I once came upon a gipsy camp, and saw the gipsies roasting two hedgehogs over the wood fire. They offered me a portion of one to taste of; but I declined, more from fancy than any thing else, for the smell was the same as that which arises from roast pork; and they assured me that an "urchin" (for so they named a hedgehog) was superior to the finest sucking-pig that was ever eaten. But fancy goes a long way; and I dare say, when any of you have read of the Chinese eating little fat puppy-dogs, you would rather have fasted than dined with them; and yet they are fattened and sold as commonly in the markets of China, as rabbits and hares are in England.

There is always some amusing story or another to be found in a country village, for every one there knows his neighbour; and if there are any odd traits to be laughed at amongst the cottagers, they are soon picked out, and furnish matter for

the gossips for miles around; and I will tell you a merry tale which I heard in the vale of Glentworth, of a man who thought that he was more hardly dealt with than any body else. He was a queer dissatisfied sort of a fellow, who was always a grumbling, and finding fault with his wife when he came home, if every thing was not in "apple-pie order," although every body but himself knew that a better managing little woman could not be found, if he searched every corner of the county. He never came home but what he growled like a dog with a sore throat: if he had to wait five minutes for his dinner, he complained that nothing was ever ready for him; if it was ready a few minutes before the time, he murmured and said that all the goodness was stewed out of it; if she was busy and did not enter at once into conversation with him, he said she was sulky; if she was chatty, and made herself agreeable, her tongue was running like the clatter of a mill-dam; in short, do whatever she might, she never did right. "I am compelled to work," he would often say, "from morning to night: as to you, you've only got the house to look after, and my meals to get ready, and what is that? why, nothing at all." He was deaf to all she had to say about looking after the children, attending to their little dairy (for they kept one cow), feeding the pigs, washing, and keeping the garden in order; all of which he said was nothing compared with what he had to do, and that he should like to change places with her, were it only for one day, then she would soon see the difference. The latter hint he had thrown out many a time, and one evening during the hay-harvest, after having run over his usual catalogue of complaints, great was his astonishment to hear her exclaim that she would change situations with him on the morrow; that she had stood foremost amongst the hay-makers when she was single, and, as he had so often challenged her, she would go out to work in the fields, while he staid at home and looked after the household affairs, and then she should see what *he* could do.

So the arrangement was made between them, and as the hayfield was near at hand she was to come home to dinner. Noonday came, and with it the wife home, as she had promised, her temper cheerful as ever, and her cheek already tanned by the heat of the sun; and great was her surprise, instead of seeing dinner upon the table, to find the fire extinguished, and the floor flooded with water. He had been making broth, the pot had boiled over, and a very natural consequence, the chimney had taken fire, the result of which was no dinner was forthcoming that day. In his hurry to extinguish the fire, he had left wide open the garden gate while he went to and fro to fetch water from the well; and anxious to have dinner ready early that he might have something to boast about, he had forgotten to feed the pigs, and they, never before having had to fast for so long a period, had broken out of the sty, and entered the garden, where two of them had helped themselves to whatever they could find green, and the third had tumbled head-foremost into the uncovered well. The eldest boy had been tempted by a penny to show a tinker all his mother's hen roosts, and the gipsy tinker had walked off with every egg he could lay his hands on, besides carrying away three couple of her finest chickens; nor was there a garment left upon the garden hedge, although she had left it in the morning covered with lawn as white as driven snow; and all this had been accomplished while her husband was busy in extinguishing the fire. The cow had also escaped from the shed, and was found locked up in a neighbouring pin-fold. Added to all this, he was drawing himself a draught of beer from the barrel in the dairy, when he was first alarmed by the cry of the children that the chimney was on fire, and in his eagerness to extinguish it, he rushed out without turning the tap, so that when his wife went to quench her thirst she found the barrel empty, and the dairy flooded; the cat also, embracing so favourable an opportunity, had helped herself to the milk, and licked up all the cream, as clean as if it had been

skimmed, while the half of a raw leg of mutton, which stood on a dish beside the stool had been carried away by the dog, who in his eagerness to escape had upset the butter, and left it amongst the beer which flooded the floor. To mend matters, the children had upset the bee-hive, and besides getting stung, the whole of the honey was scattered upon the ground. Nor did this chapter of accidents end here. Having heard that the best way to extinguish a fire in a chimney, was to block up the pot with wet clothes, he had planted a ladder against the roof of the cottage, seized upon whatever came handiest, which was a washing-tub of wet clothes in the kitchen, and so had stuffed down the blazing chimney-pot, his wife's best gown and the children's Sunday frocks, which having passed this ordeal of water, fire, and soot, as a matter of course, could never be worn again. The fire had frightened the pigeons from the dove-cote, and they never returned. Such was the home the wife found after only a few hours' absence in the hay-field, and which before had ever been so clean and comfortable, that you might have sat down upon the floor to have eaten your dinner, as the saying is. The husband never spoke a word, but sighing heavily, he took the hay-fork from her hand, and stalked off, dinnerless, to the hay-field. When he came home again in the evening all was put to rights as if nothing had happened, saving the loss of the pig and the pigeons, and from that hour he was never known to grumble again; for although his experience in domestic affairs had been of such short duration, it had cured him, and he never after proposed to exchange situations with his wife. Some of the neighbours say that the old moral of "Let everybody mind their own business," originated with him; but the saying is of much older date than my story.

Now is the time to look out for a squirrel's nest, if you wish to find the young ones in it; but it would be cruel to carry them away, for however much care and attention we might bestow upon them, we could never make them so com-

fortable as the old squirrels do, for they pay great regard to their young. But I should like to show you their nest, it is so beautifully made. The moss and leaves and the fibres of trees are interwoven so neatly together, that you might fancy a bird had built it; and sometimes it is found in a hole in the tree, or snugly embedded in some point where the branches shoot out, looking like a great knot or protuberance; so skilful is the squirrel in matching the colour of its nest with the bark that you might look up among the branches a dozen times without discovering it, unless you chance to start the old one from the spot; and this, I can tell you, is no easy matter, for you might shout and pelt a long while before it would move. You would be astonished to see the leaps which the

SQUIRREL

can take from one tree to another; sometimes when chased by boys, in its eagerness to escape, it will, while making a spring, fall upon the ground, and that is the moment to capture it, for should the squirrel once reach the root of an adjoining tree, he is up, over your head, and off again amongst the branches in an instant. It is curious to see it eat, sitting

upon its haunches, and holding the food in its fore-paws like a monkey. Only give it a nut, and see how soon it will gnaw through the hard shell, being also very particular before eating the kernel to strip every bit of the brown skin off, before a morsel is swallowed. In its wild state it feeds upon young shoots, leaf-buds, acorns, nuts, beech-mast, and also makes sad havoc with the bark of young trees. It lays up provision for the winter, not only in its nest, but in any hole it may chance to find in the surrounding trees, having sometimes a dozen of these secret storehouses within a few leaps of its hiding-place; and sometimes the squirrels will build their nests in the same tree for years together. But here I cannot resist giving you a description of a squirrel-hunt, written by an old poet, named William Browne, above two hundred years ago :—

"——A nimble squirrel from the wood,
Ranging the hedges for his filbert-food,
Sits partly on a bough, his brown nuts cracking,
And from the shell the sweet white kernel taking:
When with their crooks and bags, a host of boys,
To share with him, come with so great a noise,
That he is forced to leave a nut nigh broke,
And for his life leap to a neighbouring oak;
Thence to a beech, thence to a row of ashes;
While through the quagmires, and red water plashes,
The boys run, dabbling on through thick and thin;
One tears his hose, the other breaks his shin;
This, torn and tattered, hath, with much ado,
Got through the briars—and that hath lost his shoe;
This drops his band, that headlong falls for haste;
Another cries behind for being the last:
With sticks and stones, and many a sounding hollow,
The little fool with no small sport they follow;
Whilst he, from tree to tree, from spray to spray,
Gets to the wood, and hides him in his *dray*" [nest].

I forgot to tell you, whilst describing the old river bed and the grebe, what a place it was for the

LAPWING, OR PEEWIT,

which naturalists have named the Green Plover; although few of the country people, who live in the neighbourhood of its haunts, would know the Peewit by that name. It is a beautiful bird, with such a splendid plume of feathers upon its head; and so richly marked, that although only looking as if it were black and white at a distance, yet when clearly examined, it is beautifully shaded with blue and purple and green, almost as rich as the colours in a dove's neck, where you can neither tell where the green begins, nor the blue and the purple ends, so gorgeously are the hues blended when seen in a favourable light. Its motions in the air are very graceful. I have watched it for an hour together, and seen it make such sweeps and circles, now up, then down again, wheeling round, then flying afar off, to allure you from its nest, and all the time crying "pee-wit pee-wit" loud or low, just as the wind bore the sound on the air, or as the shrill notes came softened by the distance. But what is most singular, it builds no nest, but lays its eggs (which are four in number) in any hole in the marshy ground; and I have often found the eggs crushed, and the young ones killed,

by the heavy hoof of a bullock. The young peewits can run two or three days after they are hatched; and are sooner able to "pick up their living" than any bird I know, as they feed on worms and slugs, and such like insects which all moist and marshy grounds abound in. When fully fledged, they are a great ornament to a garden, and look very beautiful with their fine feathery crests blowing about—and only let them once see a worm, and down the throat it goes in an instant! and some say that they are so cunning as to tap with their feet upon the ground, when the silly worm, mistaking the sound for that of the mole, creeps out of its hole to escape the enemy that it fancies is coming along underground, and so is gobbled up by the artful peewit, and as the saying is, it "jumps out of the frying pan into the fire."

Now as the peewit is so useful in a garden in destroying insects, we could find plenty of customers for them, when fully fledged, who would willingly give us a shilling for a nest of four young ones. But then as I have told you, they can run soon after they are hatched, and hide themselves in any hole or corner, where they would be as still as mice, until we were gone; beside, if we had caught them while they were such poor little unfledged things, we could not have sold them. So the way we did was this, when we found a nest of young peewits, we used to fasten one end of a string to one of their feet, and peg the other end of it into the ground, so that they could not run far, and so we kept them prisoners, until they were big enough to become "gardeners;" for you must remember they were not kept close prisoners, after we took them away, but had the whole of the garden to range in, so that they did not fare so badly after all, although we were compelled to keep their wings cut rather closely; and when they once became used to the place, they would remain there for years, without ever attempting to escape, for they lived better there in winter, than they would have done in a wild state.

There was once a man who used to gather peewits' eggs, and send them to the markets to sell (for plovers' eggs are reckoned by many fine eating). I forget what his name was, but we never knew him by any other than that of Peewit; and he used to delight us boys, by imitating the cry of the lapwing, which he could do so naturally, that you might have fancied it was the peewit itself you heard. Well, I must tell you, he sometimes drank more ale than did him good, and got what you may either call "fresh," tipsy, or drunk, so that he could not walk straight; and one dark night, whilst staggering home in this state, he chanced to thrust his elbow through a cottage window, when, instead of walking away, he began to cry out, "peewit, peewit," and then hid himself at the end of the cottage, and varying his voice, as he alone could vary it, whilst imitating the cry of that bird, until the poor simple people within looked out, and seeing no one there, actually believed that a peewit had flown against the window in the dark and broken it; for he was a good ventriloquist, and could make his voice sound as if it was a great distance off; nor would the secret ever have been discovered, had he not one night whilst at the ale house divulged it himself. He was a very good natured man, and when we used to call after him, "Peewit," he would answer, "Hey, hey!—my lads, peewit, peewit," and away he would go sounding "peewit" in such a variety of tones, that you might have fancied yourself wandering in the old river bed, whilst a dozen different birds were answering one another; so shrill, loud, low, distant, and near at hand, did he seem to change his voice, as he walked along. Oh! what a garden full of peewits had he! many of them were several years old, and would come when he called, and eat out of his hand; then he had such droll names for them, such as Silver-lip, Tim Bobbin, Tommy-long-tuft, and one that was lame he called Betty Black, after a lame old woman who lived next door; and sometimes Betty and the bird would come hopping up together, then the old woman would say, "Its too bad of thee,

Peewit, that it is!" while Peewit only laughed at the joke—but he is dead now, poor old Peewit! Peace to his memory!

And now, my young readers, I have brought you to the close of Summer, for the silence of the birds in the fields, and the rustling of the white corn, which is already ripe for the sickle, tells me that Autumn is at hand, and through that "season of mists and yellow fruitfulness," it is my intention to conduct you in the next portion of this work, where, although we shall find fewer flowers than paved our pleasant Summer path, there will be no lack of objects of equal interest amid the many wonderful things which I yet hope to make you acquainted with. I will show you how Autumn opens her great garner house, into which ten thousand orchards empty their fruit, and the yellow corn-fields pour forth their treasures; also how beautiful is that boundary line which Nature has drawn across the different seasons. Further on into the year I will advance, bringing the white and hoary Winter before you, with his "frost, and snow, and rime," and show you that amid all her changes Nature is ever beautiful, and that whatever object the eye lights upon harmonises with the scenery around—that even in the absence of green trees, and variegated flowers, she is still busy with her wonderful work, making preparations for the approaching Spring; and that when I have finished my labour, you will be in possession of a complete History of the Seasons, which will be of use to you in after-life—a key which will open the great Garden of Knowledge, and enable you more clearly to comprehend the many marvels which are to be found therein; that you will be better able to understand those valuable works which, from age to age, have been produced by wise and learned men, and to look back with pleasure upon the little book which first ushered you into this great world of wonders. I will tell you how many animals, which cannot find food in the inclement season of winter, sleep secure and warm in their little nests, nor wake again until the approach of Spring, when

Nature has provided for their wants; of birds that leave us, and fly hundreds of miles over wide and perilous seas, seeking far off shores, where summer still reigns, and returning to us again when our fields and woods are covered with leaves and blossoms; how the twitter of hundreds of assembled swallows, which congregate on the banks of our rivers, are a sure sign that the Summer has departed, and that when they are again seen skimming over our ponds and rivers, and perched upon the eaves of our houses, we know that "the winter is past—the rain is over and gone—that the flowers again appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come!" For by such signs as these were the Seasons marked so far back as the days of King Solomon, and they were observed by Abraham when he pastured his cattle in the plains of Jordan. There are but few countries where the seasons follow each other in such beautiful succession as in our own, where such a distinct line is drawn between the division of Spring and Summer—Autumn and Winter; and the growing and ripening, the gathering in, and the decay of Nature, are all marked out in clear and comprehensive lines, and so strongly limned that the eye of the naturalist cannot mistake them. Where each Season is known by its particular flowers, by the singing or the silence of its birds, that blossom follows bud, the fruit the flowers, and that even the withered and the fallen leaves form a rich soil for the vegetation of the coming Spring: that when to our eyes Nature may seem to sleep, she is still busy in her silent and hidden work, and forming the buds which are again to put forth and hang up her Summer chambers with waving curtains of green.